



FOR THE LOVE OF METAPHYSICS

NIHILISM AND THE CONFLICT OF REASON
FROM KANT TO ROSENZWEIG

KARIN NISENBAUM

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To my father and mother, and to Emma

So, this is how the matter truly stands: first Critical Philosophy undermines metaphysics theoretically, for the love of science; then, since everything now tends to sink into the wide open, bottomless, abyss of an absolute subjectivity, it undermines science practically, for the love of metaphysics.

—F. H. Jacobi

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For the Love of Metaphysics

Introduction

One of the central aims of Kant's critical philosophy is to diagnose a debilitating illness affecting human reason and human experience, and to provide a form of therapy by means of reason's self-examination. Kant describes one manifestation of this illness in the sentence that opens his *Critique of Pure Reason*:

Human reason has the peculiar fate in one species of its cognitions that it is burdened with questions which it cannot dismiss, since they are given to it as problems by the nature of reason itself, but which it also cannot answer, since they transcend every capacity of human reason.¹

The general form of this illness can be described in a few different ways. It is symptomatic of the failure to perform a delicate balancing act between thinking and acting, or knowing and willing.² It reveals the tension between desiring to meet reason's unconditioned demands and not knowing whether the conditions that make it sensible to try to meet those demands obtain.³ As I will soon explain, it stems from a conflict between the principles or rules that govern each power or faculty of the mind and their associated conditions for being applied: what is at issue is whether each faculty of the mind can continue to pursue its own interest, its own distinctive activity, when we cannot

¹ KrV, Aviii.

² As I will soon explain, in the introduction to the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique*, Kant holds that a natural and unavoidable transcendental illusion arises because certain subjective principles of reason appear or are taken to be objective. In his *Kant's Dialectic*, Jonathan Bennett argues that, in this context, the subjective/objective distinction is virtually identical with the practical/theoretical distinction. See Bennett (1974), 268: "In this context, the subjective/objective distinction is not concerned with inner/outer. It is in fact virtually the practical/theoretical distinction—the line between something which tells scientists how to behave and something which reports facts about reality."

³ See Allison (2004), 330; Watkins (2010), 151.

know whether the conditions under which alone it is reasonable to do so are realized.⁴ This is the conflict of reason.

In this book I contend that the development of German philosophy from Kant, through post-Kantian German Idealism, to the thought of Franz Rosenzweig, was largely motivated by the perceived promise of Kant's philosophy for solving the conflict of reason, but also by its perceived shortcomings in solving this conflict. As I will argue below, Kant's solution to the conflict of reason hinges on his view that reason's quest for the unconditioned can only be realized practically. My main contention is that the rise and fall of German Idealism should be told as a story about the different interpretations, appropriations, radicalizations, and problematizations of this central Kantian insight.

To start, let me explain how what I am describing as a conflict of reason relates to what Kant calls transcendental illusion. In the introduction to the Transcendental Dialectic of the first *Critique*, Kant explains that a natural and unavoidable transcendental illusion arises because certain subjective principles of reason appear or are taken to be objective.⁵ For example, the subjective principle for the logical use of reason is, "Find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding, with which its unity will be completed."⁶ The objective version of this subjective principle is, "When the conditioned is given, then so is the whole series of conditions subordinated one to the other, which is itself unconditioned, also given (i.e., contained in the object and its connection)."⁷ Following Michelle Grier's account in her *Kant's Doctrine of Transcendental Illusion*, I will refer to these two principles as "P1" and "P2," respectively.⁸ As

⁴ For the idea that each faculty or power of the mind is governed by a distinct interest, see KpV, 5:120: "To every faculty of the mind one can attribute an interest, that is, a principle that contains the condition under which alone its exercise is promoted."

⁵ See KrV, A297/B354: "Transcendental illusion, on the other hand, does not cease even though it is uncovered and its nullity is clearly seen into by transcendental criticism The cause of this is that in our reason (considered subjectively as a human faculty of cognition) there lie fundamental rules and maxims for its use, which look entirely like objective principles, and through them it comes about that the subjective necessity of a certain connection of our concepts on behalf of the understanding is taken for an objective necessity, the determination of things in themselves." For a helpful discussion of Kant's conception of reason, including why reason searches for the unconditioned, and how reason's search for the unconditioned generates the transcendental ideas, see Allison (2004), 308–322.

⁶ KrV, A307/B364.

⁷ KrV, A307–308/B364.

⁸ See Grier (2001), 119–130. See also Allison (2004), 329–332. Both Grier and Allison call P2 the "supreme principle of reason," based on Kant's following remark: "Such a principle of pure reason, however, is obviously synthetic; for the conditioned is analytically related to some condition, but not to the unconditioned. . . . The principles arising from this supreme principle of pure reason will, however, be transcendent in respect of all appearances, i.e., no adequate empirical use can ever be made of that principle," KrV, A308/B365.

Omri Boehm has noted, these two principles are different formulations of the principle of sufficient reason, which states that for every thing, event, or state of affairs, there is a complete set of reasons that makes the existence and nature of what we are considering fully intelligible.⁹ If we are committed to the principle of sufficient reason (PSR), as we have reason to be, we believe that there are no brute facts, that there is nothing that has no reason or explanation.¹⁰ P1 is a subjective formulation of the PSR because of its imperative form: it prescribes a task, namely, that we strive for complete explanations.¹¹ By contrast, P2 is an objective formulation of the PSR because of its indicative form: it states something about the world, namely, that complete or unconditioned explanations are there to be found. P1 is a regulative formulation of the PSR; P2 is a constitutive formulation of the same.

Kant's doctrine of transcendental illusion is based on his understanding of the relationship between these two principles. He argues that an unavoidable illusion arises because P2 is a condition for the applicability of P1; as Henry Allison rightly notes, this is not because "one must be assured of *finding* all the conditions for a given conditioned" in order for it to be reasonable to search for them, but because we need to assume that they are at least "there to be found."¹² Yet on Kant's view, we can never know that this application condition (P2) is satisfied.¹³ This is because, on Kant's view, human knowledge is discursive: it requires both concepts and sensible intuition; yet what is unconditioned can never be given to the mind via sensible intuition; it can never be an object of

⁹ See Boehm (2016), 558: "With some interpretation, we can render both principles quite clear. Kant uses 'conditioned' here broadly, referring to anything that could be an object of cognition: any thing, event or state of affairs, which requires a condition other than itself in order to be given as a fact. A 'condition' is the cause or the reason—what would count as an explanation of a conditioned that is given as a fact. . . . An 'unconditioned' is thus an ultimate condition, an ultimate explanatory ground of what is given as conditioned. It is ultimate in the sense that it does not itself require further grounds for being given. . . . In this light, P1 and P2 are nothing but formulations of the PSR." See Leibniz (1991), 217.

¹⁰ In chapter 2, I consider some of the reasons for commitment to the PSR and discuss the extent to which Kant is or is not committed to this principle.

¹¹ See Boehm (2016), 559.

¹² Allison (2004), 331–332: "The question is not whether one must be assured of finding all the conditions for a given conditioned; it is rather whether it need be assumed that they are there to be found. But it is not at all clear that the latter assumption is dispensable. Indeed, precisely because the search is for conditions, it seems that the assumption (though not the search) cannot be abandoned without denying P1. After all, a 'condition hunt' is not like, say, the hunt for a hidden treasure, which one might reasonably pursue, while acknowledging that it may not exist."

¹³ This raises the important question concerning what sort of assent to P2 we *are* entitled to. In an unpublished paper, Eric Watkins contends that our attitude toward the unconditioned best fits what Kant calls belief. This is an interesting suggestion, but it also seems to go against Kant's reserving belief for practical matters.

knowledge.¹⁴ We cannot reasonably act on the demands of reason (P1) without assuming that their associated conditions for being applied (P2) are realized, but we can never know that they are realized.¹⁵

In light of Kant's doctrine of transcendental illusion, it should be clear why what I am calling the conflict of reason stems from a conflict between the principles or maxims that govern each power or faculty of the mind and their associated conditions for being applied. This is a conflict of reason, because, on Kant's view, reason is the "faculty of principles" that determines the interest of all the powers or faculties of the mind.¹⁶ Yet it is important to note that there is a conflict of reason considered in its speculative use, and also a conflict of reason considered in its practical use. In what follows, I will focus on some of the important differences between these two manifestations of the conflict of reason.

Kant has various strategies for alleviating the conflict of reason, including his distinction between transcendental idealism and transcendental realism, and his related distinction between appearances and things in themselves. Yet there is an important difference between his diagnosis of and solution to the conflict of reason in its speculative use, and his diagnosis of and solution to the conflict of reason in its practical use. In the *Antinomy of Pure Reason*, Kant argues that the distinction between appearances and things in themselves alleviates one manifestation of the conflict of reason in its speculative use, because this distinction helps us realize that reason's search for the totality of conditions for any conditioned object applies to things in themselves and appearances in different ways.¹⁷ As Eric Watkins explains the point, Kant holds that "for things in themselves it is the case that the totality of conditions and thus the unconditioned as well

¹⁴ See Allison (2004), 330: "The absolute totality of conditions or, equivalently, the unconditioned posited by P1 can never be given as an object." Kant never provides an argument for his view that human knowledge is discursive (unless we consider the *Antinomy of Pure Reason* as an indirect argument for transcendental idealism, which involves the view that we cannot know things in themselves). See Allison (2004), 13–14. As we will see in chapter 2, the fact that Kant doesn't provide an argument for the discursivity thesis is central to Maimon's critique of Kant.

¹⁵ It is worth mentioning that I am focusing here on the manifestation of the conflict of reason in the *Antinomy of Pure Reason*. In the case of the *Ideal of Pure Reason*, for example, the problem is hypostatizing the ideal of the supremely real being, i.e., giving the ideal a real existence independent of its concept. See KrV, A583/B611n. Yet the underlying thought is still similar: we can have a concept of the unconditioned, but we cannot provide the intuition that would yield knowledge of the unconditioned.

¹⁶ KrV, A299/B356. In the case of the theoretical employment of reason, reason is the faculty of principles of cognition or knowledge; in the case of the practical employment of reason, reason is the faculty of principles of volition or action.

¹⁷ That having to do with reason's search for the "unconditioned unity of objective conditions in appearances." KrV, A406/B433.

must exist if the conditioned exists.”¹⁸ The relevant passage from the first *Critique* appears in section 7 of the Antinomy of Pure Reason:

If the conditioned as well as its condition are things in themselves, then when the first is given not only is the regress to the second given as a problem, but the latter is thereby really already given along with it; and, because this holds for all members of the series, then the complete series of conditions, and hence the unconditioned is thereby simultaneously given.¹⁹

Yet this is not the case if we are considering the situation for appearances. As Kant explains:

On the contrary, if I am dealing with appearances, which as mere representations are not given at all if I do not achieve acquaintance with them . . . then I cannot say with the same meaning that if the conditioned is given, then all the conditions (as appearances) for it are also given; and hence I can by no means infer the absolute totality of the series of these conditions. . . . But in such a case one can very well say that a regress to the conditions, i.e., a continued empirical synthesis on this side is demanded or given as a problem.²⁰

In other words, P2, the objective or constitutive formulation of the PSR would hold for things in themselves, if we could know them; but P1, the subjective or regulative formulation of the PSR holds for appearances. Watkins aptly summarizes how this distinction helps alleviate the conflict of reason:

As soon as one draws the distinction [between appearances and things in themselves], reason can require that its demands be satisfied for things in themselves, though it has no way of knowing how they are, but it cannot require that this very same demand be satisfied for appearances as a result of their essential lack of complete determinacy; instead, reason can demand only that one continue to search for ever further conditions, even if one knows that the totality of conditions . . . can never be given in experience.²¹

What I would like to stress is the Kantian view that the unconditioned can in principle never be an object of theoretical knowledge. In the case of the speculative use of reason, there is a necessary “mismatch between appearances and

¹⁸ Watkins (2010), 150.

¹⁹ KrV, A498/B526.

²⁰ KrV, A499/B527.

²¹ Watkins (2010), 150.

the idea of reason, which only things in themselves are adequate to"; but we can at least attempt to reduce the distance between appearances and the ideas of reason, by continuing to search for the conditions for any given conditioned.²² The ideas of reason serve to direct or regulate our search for the conditions for any given conditioned, by way of limiting concepts. This is the negative result of Kant's critical philosophy: Kant prohibits the employment of reason in metaphysical speculations outside the bounds of experience and denies us knowledge of the supersensible.²³

Yet it is important to keep in mind that there is a Dialectic in each of the three *Critiques*, and Kant's understanding of and solution to the conflict of reason is not entirely the same in each case. In what follows, I will highlight what I take to be the most important difference between Kant's solution to the conflict of reason in its speculative use and his solution to the conflict of reason in its practical use. At the start of the Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason, Kant explains why there is also a Dialectic of Pure Reason in its practical use:

Pure reason always has its dialectic, whether it is considered in its speculative or in its practical use; for it requires the absolute totality of conditions for a given conditioned, and this can be found only in things in themselves. . . . But reason in its practical use is no better off. As pure practical reason it likewise seeks the unconditioned for the practically conditioned (which rests on inclinations and natural needs), not indeed as the determining ground of the will, but even when this is given (in the moral law), it seeks the unconditioned totality of the object of pure practical reason, under the name of the highest good.²⁴

That is, there is also a dialectic of practical reason, because practical reason seeks the "unconditioned totality of the object of pure practical reason," namely, the highest good, the systematic relation between virtue and happiness. Yet in appearances we can never discover a systematic connection between virtue and happiness. Kant's solution to the conflict of reason in its practical use also involves the distinction between appearances and things in themselves, but two other notions are equally important: the notion of a primacy of practical reason,

²² Watkins (2010), 150.

²³ The Antinomy of Pure Reason doesn't exhaust the Dialectic of Pure Reason, and understanding more fully Kant's solution to the conflict of reason in its speculative use would require detailed discussion of the Paralogisms and Ideal of Pure Reason. For a helpful analysis, see Allison (2004), 307–422, and Grier (2001), 143–260.

²⁴ KpV, 5:107–108.

and the notion that practical reason is not receptive, as is speculative reason, but efficacious, or capable of realizing its objects.²⁵

On Kant's view, the thesis of the primacy of practical reason concerns how we should conceive the relationship between the *interest* of reason in its speculative or theoretical use, and the *interest* of reason in its practical use. If the interest of reason in its speculative use "consists in the cognition of the object up to the highest a priori principles," and if the interest of reason in its practical use "consists in the determination of the will with respect to the final and complete end" (the highest good), when these two interests come into conflict (when the demand for knowledge comes into conflict with the determination of the will), we should give primacy to the interest of reason in its practical use, since on Kant's view "all interest is ultimately practical."²⁶ So when certain theoretical propositions (e.g., "we are free"; "God exists"; "we have an immortal soul") that are "withdrawn from any possible insight of speculative reason" are shown to be inseparably connected with the principles of practical reason, speculative reason must accept such propositions "as something offered to it from another source."²⁷ Such propositions are postulates of practical reason, which Kant defines as theoretical propositions that are not demonstrable as such—that is, not through any purely theoretical argument—but only "insofar as [they are] attached inseparably to an *a priori* unconditionally valid practical law."²⁸ As Wayne Martin characterizes Kant's view, "the thesis of the primacy of practical reason means that at least in certain domains, practical judgment is primary with respect to theoretical judgment in that the warrant for judgments that are theoretical in form (e.g., the existential judgment 'There is a God') is provided by a practical judgment ('I ought to bring about the highest good')."²⁹

Martin's characterization helps highlight both the structural similarity and the significant difference between Kant's conception of reason's demand for the unconditioned, and the conditions for it being reasonable to pursue that demand, in the theoretical and practical domains. Just as theoretical reason seeks the unconditioned (in the form of the totality of conditions for a given conditioned item of knowledge), practical reason demands the unconditioned totality of the object of pure practical reason, namely, the highest good, the systematic connection of virtue (the condition) and happiness (the conditioned).³⁰

²⁵ For a helpful discussion of the role played by the distinction between appearances and things in themselves in Kant's solution to the Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason, see Watkins (2010), 151–155, and Wood (1970) chap. 4.

²⁶ KpV, 5:120–122.

²⁷ KpV, 5:121.

²⁸ KpV, 5:122.

²⁹ Martin (1997), 120.

³⁰ See KpV, 5:110–114.

Kant highlights this structural similarity in the passage from the beginning of the Dialectic of Pure Practical Reason that I cited earlier.³¹ Also, just as in the case of theoretical reason, there are certain metaphysical presuppositions necessary for it to be reasonable to pursue the object of pure practical reason (the highest good), namely, the postulates. Yet note an important difference: the form of inference that in the first *Critique* Kant attributes to being deceived by transcendental illusion is precisely the form of inference that he uses in his argument for the postulates in the second *Critique*, namely, making determinate objective (metaphysical) claims based on certain subjective principles. In the first *Critique*, we are not entitled to ascribe objective validity to P2 based on what P1 demands. For example, in the Transcendental Ideal, this form of inference is what Kant calls hypostatization: giving an object a real existence independent of its idea.³² By contrast, in the second *Critique* we *are* entitled to affirm the postulates once we see that they are conditions of possibility for pursuing the highest good; that is, we are entitled to “assume the existence of God” once we see how that assumption is a condition for “aiming at the highest good.”³³

³¹ KpV, 5:108: “Pure reason always has its dialectic, whether it is considered in its speculative or in its practical use; for it requires the absolute totality of conditions for a given conditioned, and this can be found only in things in themselves. . . . But reason in its practical use is no better off. As pure practical reason it likewise seeks the unconditioned for the practically conditioned . . . not indeed as the determining ground of the will, but even when this is given (in the moral law), it seeks the unconditioned totality of the object of pure practical reason, under the name of the highest good.”

³² See KrV, A583/B611n: “This ideal of the supremely real being, even though it is a mere representation, is first realized, i.e., made into an object, then hypostatized, and finally, as we will presently allege, through a natural progress of reason in the completion of unity, it is even personified.” Allison rightly notes that in this context the difference between “realization” and “hypostatization” amounts to the distinction between the unavoidable result of transcendental illusion and the avoidable result of being deceived by it. See Allison (2004), 409: “Although personification can be ignored here, the contrast between the realization and hypostatization is of paramount significance, since it amounts to the distinction between the unavoidable result of the illusion and the avoidable result of being deceived by it. Of particular relevance is the characterization of realization as an act of making an idea into an object. Since to hypostatize is to give an object a real existence independent of its idea, insofar as realization is distinguished from it, the objectification it involves can be understood only as the generation of an intentional object or what Kant terms an ‘object [given] in the idea,’ as opposed to one given ‘absolutely’ (A670/B698).”

³³ KpV, 5:125; KpV, 5:133. Korsgaard argues that this is because of the priority of practical reason. On my view, and as I will soon argue, this has to do with the efficacy of practical reason. See Korsgaard (1996), 119: “I have said that practical reason shares the ‘fate’ of theoretical reason insofar as it, too, is driven to ‘seek the unconditioned.’ In an important sense, however, the fate of practical reason is different from that of theoretical reason; this is one of the most central tenets of Kant’s philosophy. Theoretical reason, in its quest for the unconditioned, produces antinomies; in the end, the kind of unconditional explanation that would fully satisfy reason is unavailable. Practical reason in its quest for justification is subject to no such limitation. This is part of Kant’s doctrine of the primacy of practical reason.”

Why Kant believes that we are entitled to make this form of inference in the case of practical reason, but not in the case of theoretical reason, has to do with a fundamental difference between theoretical and practical reason: namely, that while theoretical reason is receptive, practical reason is efficacious. Let me briefly clarify this crucial difference and then explain how it helps us understand the otherwise puzzling structural similarity between Kant's argument for the postulates and the erroneous form of inference that in the first *Critique* Kant attributes to being deceived by transcendental illusion.

In recent years, Stephen Engstrom has focused his attention on the significance of Kant's distinction between theoretical and practical reason and traced its lineage to what he calls a "practical-cognitivist" tradition in ethics that reaches back to thinkers like Aquinas and Aristotle.³⁴ As Engstrom notes, when we assume that reason is solely a theoretical capacity, we believe that reason is only "a capacity to acquire knowledge of things that exist independently of that knowledge."³⁵ If the objects of reason (conceived as a theoretical capacity) are to be known, they must already be given in sensible intuition, and they must be other than myself. On this model, "reason has no power to produce anything outside its representations, but serves merely to achieve a true representation of things that are there anyway. It simply tracks reality."³⁶ Conceived as a theoretical capacity, reason is receptive. Yet as Engstrom rightly notes, this isn't how Kant conceives knowledge that is practical. When Kant says that what is practical is "to be made real through our will," he conveys the idea that practical knowledge is distinguished by its efficacy: what practical knowledge represents is its *own* effect, its *own* action, something that depends on *it* for its realization.³⁷ This point becomes even clearer if we keep in mind that willing falls under the broad category of voluntary movements that spring from "the faculty of desire," which Kant defines as the capacity of a being "to be through its representations the cause of the *actuality* of the objects of those representations."³⁸ Engstrom clarifies the most important implication of the view that practical knowledge is efficacious:

The existential relation in which practical knowledge stands to what it knows is accordingly the reverse of the relation in the theoretical case.

³⁴ See Engstrom (2009) and (2013). Eric Watkins also emphasizes the efficacy of practical reason in his discussion of Kant's solution to the Antinomy of Practical Reason. See Watkins (2010), 162–163.

³⁵ Engstrom (2013), 138.

³⁶ Engstrom (2013), 138. It is worth noting that, on Kant's view, (theoretical) reason is also active in constituting the form of its objects; but the objects of (theoretical) reason are still the cause of its representations, and in this sense (theoretical) reason is not productive.

³⁷ KpV, 5:113.

³⁸ KpV, 5:9n.

Since what theoretical knowledge knows does not depend for its actuality on the actuality of that knowledge, the actuality of the knowledge must depend on the actuality of what it knows; what practical knowledge knows, in contrast, depends for its actuality on the actuality of the knowledge.³⁹

In the case of theoretical knowledge, the actuality of the knowledge depends on the actuality of what is known: in order for me to know that there is a glass of water on my desk, the glass and the desk must already be there in order for me to perceive them. By contrast, in the case of practical knowledge, the actuality or reality of what is known depends on the actuality or reality of the knowledge. By “the actuality of the knowledge,” Engstrom means the actual determination of the will; this is because, like Kant, he believes that willing can be understood as a form of practical judgment and hence as a form of knowledge.⁴⁰ So in the case of practical knowledge, the actuality of what is known depends on the actual determination of the will. This implies that in the case of practical knowledge, being, reality, or actuality is *transferred* from the will to the objects of the will; moreover, it is by this transference of being from the will to the objects of the will that the latter can potentially be known.

Focusing on the efficacy of practical reason helps explain why Kant believes that we are entitled to make objective (metaphysical) claims based on practical reason’s demand for the unconditioned, but not based on theoretical reason’s demand for the unconditioned. In order for us to know something (theoretically), it must be presented in sensible intuition. In order for us know something (practically), it must be brought about. But we know that we cannot know the unconditioned object of theoretical reason (because we can never find in appearances the complete series of conditions for a given conditioned), but we do not know that we cannot know the unconditioned object of practical reason (because the highest good is something to be made actual through our will; it is something we must bring about). Thus, there is an important difference between the cognitive status of the unconditioned when we are considering the speculative use of reason and the cognitive status of the unconditioned when we are considering the practical use of reason. Although the unconditioned functions as an ideal or regulative principle both in the theoretical case and in the practical case, in the practical case it is also an ideal that could potentially be realized by our will.⁴¹

³⁹ Engstrom (2013), 145.

⁴⁰ See Engstrom (2009), 23–65.

⁴¹ Watkins also draws attention to this idea, and rightly adds that the highest good is “something more than a merely regulative principle insofar as Kant does want to establish its real possibility, a status that is not necessary for merely regulative principles.” See Watkins (2010), 163.

In my opening remarks, I mentioned that Kant's solution to the conflict of reason hinges on his view that reason's quest for the unconditioned can only be realized practically. In the case of theoretical reason, Kant shows that we can avoid being deceived by transcendental illusion by giving the ideas of reason the status of regulative principles. Yet in the case of practical reason, we should aim to realize the highest good, and the requirement to do so entitles us to affirm the postulates: we must think of the highest good as realizable, and that grants reality to the conditions for this realizability (i.e., the postulates). In the chapters that follow, my aim is to show that the development of post-Kantian German Idealism is propelled by the different interpretations, appropriations, and radicalizations of the Kantian view that the representation of the unconditioned (or absolute) by finite beings is a topic of practical, not theoretical, philosophy.

The early philosophical writings of Kant's successors, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel, clearly testify to their concern with this aspect of Kant's critical philosophy. This fact evidences the importance of this problem for understanding the issues that shaped German Idealism. Some of the early works that stand out as testifying to the post-Kantian German Idealists' interest in the promise of Kant's critical philosophy for solving the conflict of reason include, in chronological order, Fichte's *Attempt at a Critique of All Revelation* (1792) and his *Review of Aenesidemus* (1792); Schelling's "Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism" (1795), the "Oldest System-Program of German Idealism" (1796), and the *Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge* (1797); Fichte's "On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World" (1798) and *The Vocation of Man* (1800); and Hegel's *Faith and Knowledge* (1802). These writings all deal with many of the ideas directly related to Kant's understanding of and solution to the conflict of reason, including Kant's moral theology, the prioritizing of the practical, and the postulates of practical reason. I do not propose to cover, in this book, all this material. My aim is to offer a new take on the legacy of Kant's critical philosophy that I hope will help students and scholars of this period find new meaning in this philosophical tradition.⁴²

Chapter Outline

In this book, I propose that we view the conflict of reason as the central problem shaping the contours of post-Kantian German Idealism. Yet one might ask: Isn't

⁴² In what follows I provide further details of the works I will cover in the book, and I explain why Hegel does not play a central role in the narrative I tell.

the explicit aim of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* to set metaphysics on the "secure course of a science," not only to reconcile thinking and acting, knowing and willing?⁴³ The first part of the book addresses this question. I begin by explaining why, during the first two decades after the publication of the first *Critique*, Kant's critics and followers came to understand the aim of Kant's critical philosophy in what might initially seem to be this narrower sense. I argue that F. H. Jacobi and Salomon Maimon set the stage for the reception of Kant's critical philosophy by conceiving its aim in terms of meeting reason's demand for unconditioned explanation, and by identifying this aim with the goal of setting metaphysics on the secure course of a science. Jacobi also set the stage for the reception of Kant's critical philosophy by claiming, on the one hand, that only a monistic metaphysics could satisfy reason's demand for unconditioned explanation, and on the other hand, that nobody could uphold this metaphysical outlook since it would lead to fatalism and a form of nihilism. Early on, then, the conflict of reason came to be understood as a conflict between the interest of reason in its speculative use and the interest of reason in its practical use, and this came to be perceived as the central problem that Kant's philosophy was concerned with addressing.

This first part of the book also clarifies why the post-Kantian German Idealists believed that, in order to solve reason's conflict with itself, philosophy would need to obtain the form of a systematic derivation of the transcendental conditions of human experience from a single first principle. If Jacobi supplied the impulse for going forward from Kant, I argue, Salomon Maimon supplied the direction to be taken. Although many scholars have noted the important role that Jacobi and Maimon played in the reception of Kant's critical philosophy, a distinctive feature of this book is that it highlights largely overlooked parallels between Jacobi's so-called philosophy of faith, Maimon's demand that a philosophical system be actualized, and Kant's prioritizing of the practical. As I hope to show, for each of these three thinkers, philosophy is based on freedom: it is based on the philosopher's freedom to construct a comprehensive explanation of human experience by employing his or her imaginative capacity and on the reader's freedom to accept or reject that explanation. Jacobi and Maimon enabled the post-Kantian German Idealists to see that only by radicalizing Kant's doctrine of the primacy of practical reason could philosophy hope to meet reason's demand for unconditioned explanation, without falling prey to a form of nihilism.

The manner in which the post-Kantian German Idealists radicalized Kant's prioritizing of the practical is the central topic of the second part of

⁴³ KrV, Bxix.

the book, which focuses on early works by J. G. Fichte and F. W. J. Schelling. As I mentioned earlier, on Kant's view, the thesis of the "primacy of the practical" concerns how we should conceive the relationship between the interest of reason in its speculative use, and the interest of reason in its practical use. (If the interest of reason in its speculative use consists in the cognition of objects, and if the interest of reason in its practical use consists in the determination of the will, then we should give primacy to the interest of reason in its practical use when these two interests come into conflict, and this entitles us to affirm the postulates of practical reason.) Yet Fichte and Schelling transform this thesis into the more radical claim that reason as a whole is in some sense grounded in the practical.

To clarify this view, the second part of the book starts by providing a Fichtean interpretation of Kant's Deduction of Freedom in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. On Fichte's view, the manner in which the Deduction of Freedom explains moral obligation can be used, more generally, to explain what grounds all constraint or necessitation, both in the theoretical and practical domains. In the effort to elucidate this Fichtean idea, I engage in the contemporary debate on the nature of transcendental arguments and make three central claims concerning the aim and method of such arguments: first, that transcendental arguments are concerned with a form of skepticism that questions our grounds for holding onto our beliefs; second, that such arguments function by revealing the relations of presupposition between our *commitments*, or between the concepts and beliefs that we *ascribe to ourselves*; third, that such arguments cannot provide a refutation of skepticism, but only an invitation to adopt a philosophical system or standpoint, a standpoint whose value can only be determined by inhabiting it. To support these three claims, I discuss the purpose of a thought experiment that Kant introduces in §6 of the *Analytic* in the second *Critique*. I argue that the purpose of this thought experiment is to elicit from us respect for the moral law. If the example does elicit such respect, that fact demonstrates we have determined our freedom by accepting Kant's invitation to uphold for ourselves the idea or ideal of autonomy or pure self-determination as the highest norm for our conduct. Thus, the Deduction of Freedom affords a form of self-knowledge: it brings to consciousness a pre-reflective act of self-determination that grounds moral obligation. Or, employing Fichte's terms, the Deduction of Freedom shows that self-positing is the ground of moral obligation.

Yet, as I just mentioned, self-positing is, on Fichte's view, not only the explanatory ground of moral obligation but also the explanatory ground of all constraint or necessitation, in both the theoretical and practical domains. In chapter 4, I shed light on Fichte's complex view by building on the Fichtean interpretation of the Deduction of Freedom that I developed in chapter 3. In

addition to clarifying on its own terms the philosophical significance of Fichte's notion of the self-positing subject, a central aim of the chapter is to demonstrate that Fichte develops that notion in order to meet reason's demand for unconditioned explanation, without falling prey to the nihilistic consequences of philosophical reflection that Jacobi had diagnosed. To this end, the chapter starts by phrasing Jacobi's nihilism complaint in a manner that is conversant with current debates in metaphysics. In doing so, it shows that Jacobi and Fichte can still help us understand the place of freedom and the role of commitment within philosophical reflection. To bring the relationship between freedom and reason into focus, I clarify the idea that criticism and dogmatism represent two distinct, irrefutable, and theoretically indemonstrable philosophical systems, and offer two different interpretations of the idea that the German Idealist system is a "philosophy of practical postulates." The chapter ends with my argument that Fichte's notion of the self-positing subject fails to adequately explain the relation between subject and object that characterizes all states of human consciousness. For that reason, Schelling's hope of explaining the basic relational structure of human consciousness is the starting point for the third part of the book.

The third and final part of the book picks up where the second part left off: Fichte's notion of the self-positing subject issues in the view that there is a single fundamental entity, the "absolute I," which is constituted by two principles, a real and an ideal principle, or by two forms of activity, real and ideal activity. Moreover, on Fichte's view, the relation between real and ideal activity is simply another name for the relation between subject and object that characterizes all states of human consciousness. Yet, in the Jena period, Fichte does not seem to provide an adequate explanation for the basic relational structure of human consciousness. If so, then it appears as if Fichte gives up on the project of German Idealism, which I have been characterizing as the attempt to meet the demand for a comprehensive, rational explanation of all aspects of human experience without falling prey to nihilism. My aim in chapter 5 is to show that Schelling's 1809 *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* and his *Ages of the World* fragments of 1810–15 are works motivated by the attempt to provide an explanation for the distinction and relation of dependence between real and ideal activity, or for the relation between subject and object that characterizes all states of human consciousness. In his attempt to explain the basic relational structure of human consciousness, Schelling develops the view that human experience is grounded in three irreducible elements—God, the natural world, and human beings—which relate to one another in three temporal relations: Creation, Revelation, and Redemption.

In the final chapter and conclusion, I turn to what, I argue, is fundamentally at stake in reason's conflict with itself: namely, our ability to affirm the value of the world and human action in the world. By examining certain aspects of Franz Rosenzweig's inheritance and critique of post-Kantian German Idealism, both in the *Star of Redemption* and in some of his early philosophical and theological writings, I show that Rosenzweig's engagement with this tradition was motivated by his attempt to overcome a form of world-denial resulting from an inability to solve the conflict of reason. By developing Schelling's peculiar pantheism into a philosophical system capable of being pictorially represented in the shape of a star, whose upward-facing triangle is formed by the relations between God, human beings, and the natural world, and whose downward-facing triangle is formed by the relations between Creation, Revelation, and Redemption, Rosenzweig arrived at a form of faith that enabled him to affirm the value of the world and of human action in the world, and to reconcile thinking and acting, knowing and willing. Thus, the trajectory of Rosenzweig's life and thought, which moves from a form of faith that denies the world to a form of faith that affirms it, mirrors the trajectory of thought that the book as a whole traverses. In doing so, it brings into focus what is philosophically and existentially at issue in the development of German philosophy from Kant, through post-Kantian German Idealism, to the thought of Franz Rosenzweig.

Before discussing some of the distinctive features of this book, I would like to say a few words about why there isn't a Hegel chapter. I have argued that the conflict of reason is the central problem shaping the contours of post-Kantian German Idealism, and I have pledged to tell the story of the rise and fall of this philosophical tradition as a story about the different interpretations, appropriations, and radicalizations of Kant's view that reason's quest for the unconditioned can only be realized practically. Arguably, Kant's strategy is captured in his famous claim that he had to "deny knowledge in order to make room for faith."⁴⁴ This book is an extended commentary on the fate of this Kantian view; it is also a *defense* of it. Yet, as early as *Faith and Knowledge* (1802), Hegel firmly declares his opposition to this Kantian strategy and defines philosophy as rational cognition of God or the Absolute. Hegel rightly notes that, for Kant, Jacobi, and Fichte, "the supersensuous is incapable of being known by [theoretical] Reason . . . all of them agree that . . . the Absolute is no more against Reason than it is for it; it is beyond Reason."⁴⁵ Yet, for Hegel, the view that God or the Absolute is an object of faith, not knowledge, amounts to the renunciation of philosophy; it amounts to "nothing but the absolute restriction of Reason to the form of finitude"; it is

⁴⁴ KrV, Bxxx.

⁴⁵ HGW, 4:316; FK, 56.

nothing more than the “culture of reflection raised to a system.”⁴⁶ On Hegel’s view, truth “cannot be deceived by this sort of hallowing of . . . finitude.”⁴⁷ My book is a defense of the *love* of metaphysics; it is a defense of the Kantian idea that the representation of God or the Absolute by finite beings is a topic of practical, not theoretical, philosophy. It is for this reason that Hegel does not play a central role in the story that I am telling.

Distinguishing Features of This Book

I approach my topic from both a contemporary and a historical perspective. I offer a new take on how the story of the transition from Kant to post-Kantian German Idealism and beyond is to be told, yet this is not just a project in intellectual history. Rather, my aim is to highlight the contemporary relevance of this philosophical tradition by emphasizing the continuity between philosophy and life, between abstract philosophical problems and existential concerns. I also approach the topic from a contemporary perspective by phrasing some of the debates surrounding the reception of Kant’s critical philosophy in terms that will be familiar to readers acquainted with recent Anglophone philosophical work on ethics, metaphysics, and epistemology.

By viewing the legacy of Kant’s critical philosophy through the lens of the conflict of reason, I hope not only to draw attention to aspects of this philosophical tradition that have not received due emphasis in the scholarly literature but also to clarify the interrelationship between existing interpretations of the German philosophy of this period. In recent decades, some of the most established and creative scholars in the field have offered different paradigms for understanding the transition from Kant to post-Kantian German Idealism, through such intermediaries as Reinhold, Maimon, Schulze, Jacobi, and the Jena circle of romantics. To name just a few: Frederick Beiser and Paul Franks argue in different ways that the German Idealist interest in systematicity can be illuminated by showing that the “authority of reason [is] at stake in the construction of an all-comprehending and self-validating philosophical system.”⁴⁸ Sebastian Gardner makes the case that the fundamental motivation of German Idealism is axiological, that its “augmentation of Kant’s idealism is intelligible in terms of its combined aim of consolidating the transcendental turn and legitimating the kind of (objectual) relation to value articulated in German

⁴⁶ HGW, 4:322; FK, 64.

⁴⁷ HGW, 4:323; FK, 65.

⁴⁸ See Franks (2002a), 229; Beiser (1987), 1.

romanticism.”⁴⁹ Karl Ameriks argues that “there is a story to be told about the development of philosophy after Kant that is both *significant* and largely (but not exclusively) a matter of *regress* rather than progress”; on Ameriks’s view, the thought of Kant’s successors (such as Reinhold, Fichte, and Hegel), led to the distortion, or abandonment of Kant’s strategy of “modest systematicity,” which eventually led to “a widespread discrediting of philosophy (in its traditional special role) as such, and to an undermining of the notion of autonomy itself.”⁵⁰ Michelle Kosch examines the early history of the idea that moral agency is self-legislating and proposes to view the rise and fall of German Idealism through the lens of this idea’s central difficulty, “that of accounting for the possibility of moral evil.”⁵¹ Daniel Breazeale and Fredrick Neuhouser focus on Fichte’s early *Wissenschaftslehre* and explain how Fichte’s theory of subjectivity plays a role in establishing the unity of the practical and theoretical employments of reason, thereby bringing “unity and coherence to the human being.”⁵² Breazeale also shows how this existential task is connected with the systematic or scientific need for a “transcendental deduction of experience.”⁵³ My take on how the story of this period is to be told hopes to show that the conflict of reason can be seen as the underlying concern that competing interpretations of this period share. I return to this issue in the conclusion of the book.

⁴⁹ Gardner (2002), 211.

⁵⁰ Ameriks (2000), 8, 63. On Ameriks’s view, Kant’s philosophy is “modest” for various reasons: because he is committed to “a straightforward assertion—which is not at all the same as an ‘explanation’—of our absolute freedom” (17); because “there is no insistence on an absolute certainty for the [commonly accepted] basis [of his arguments]”; because “the derivations do not claim an absolute necessity,” and because Kant is “perfectly willing to allow that various basic aspects of experience remain inexplicable primitives; we just *do* work with space, time, and forms of judgment” (62). As I contend in chapter 2, this form of modesty is precisely what is at issue in Maimon’s critique of Kant. For example, Maimon rejects the argument of Kant’s Transcendental Deduction because his commitment to the PSR prevents him from accepting the Kantian view that space and time are the *contingent* forms of human sensibility. Yet I maintain that a form of Kantian modesty is preserved in the works of Maimon, Fichte, Schelling, and Rosenzweig. Ameriks (2000), 3.

⁵¹ Kosch (2006), 2.

⁵² Neuhouser (1990), 1.

⁵³ Breazeale (2013), 126.

PART ONE

NIHILISM, REASON, AND
FREEDOM IN THE EARLY
RECEPTION OF KANT'S
CRITICAL PHILOSOPHY

The Legacy of Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi

Restoring Human Reason to Its Full Measure

It would be hard to overestimate the influence of Jacobi's 1785 Spinoza book on the reception of Kant's *Critique*. . . . Every German idealist first read the *Critique* in light of Jacobi's provocative contention that philosophy led inexorably to Spinozism and thence to nihilism.

—Paul Franks

The claim put forward in the book on the Doctrine of Spinoza, namely, that *all human cognition derives from revelation and faith*, caused trouble everywhere in the German philosophical world.

—Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi

Introduction

When Kant concluded the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he believed he had accomplished the task he set out for himself: to set metaphysics—which was traditionally conceived as the science capable of providing a reason or grounded explanation for everything that human experience includes—on the “secure course of a science.”¹ Kant confidently predicted that if philosophers accepted his invitation to follow and build on the path of his critical philosophy, they would be able to “bring human reason to full satisfaction” by applying the new methods of his critical, or transcendental, philosophy to perennial philosophical questions, including questions concerning the basic nature of the world, the reality of freedom, and God's existence.² Yet, in the first two decades after its inception, Kant's critical philosophy confronted serious challenges from new forms of skepticism voiced by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, Salomon Maimon, Karl

¹ KrV, Bxiv.

² KrV, A856/B884. See di Giovanni (1992), 417.

Leonhard Reinhold, and Gottlob Ernst Schulze, among others. This chapter and the next one focus on the important role that Jacobi and Maimon played in the early reception and evaluation of Kant's critical philosophy. These two thinkers determined how the conflict of reason came to be understood, and they brought into focus both the promise and limitations of Kant's philosophy for solving the conflict of reason; they also proposed the methods that the post-Kantian German Idealists developed to overcome these limitations.

Briefly, Jacobi's challenge is the following one: all philosophical attempts to provide inferential justifications for convictions that are basic from the standpoint of an undistorted common sense are self-undermining. Philosophical reflection inevitably annihilates the reality of what it tries to prove or explain. In doing so, it endangers our conception of ourselves as individual beings capable of knowing and acting in a real world among other individual beings. Maimon's challenge is the following one: Kant's transcendental arguments rest on premises that do not need to be interpreted transcendently; this results in circular, question-begging arguments and undermines Kant's claim to provide *a priori* justifications for the conditions of possibility for human experience. For example, Maimon holds that Kant's account of the necessary conditions of possibility for human experience rests on a commitment to a cognitive dualism (cognition requires a faculty of thought: the understanding, and a faculty of receptivity: sensibility) that is unwarranted. Because of this presupposition, transcendental philosophy "can only beg the question, or argue in a circle" when it attempts to respond to skeptical doubts.³

My aim in this chapter is twofold. First, I hope to clarify Jacobi's view that philosophical reflection necessarily undermines itself by annihilating the reality of what it tries to prove or explain.⁴ Second, going against a long tradition of interpreters who believe that Jacobi is an irrationalist, I contend that Jacobi's concern is to restore human reason to its full measure by unveiling reason's practical

³ See Franks (2007), 252. As I will explain in chapter 2, though, there is a way of reading the argument of Kant's Transcendental Deduction that puts pressure on this more traditional, dualistic reading of Kant.

⁴ The language of annihilation comes from Thomas Reid and the Scottish School of Common Sense. See Baum (1969). Throughout this chapter, I will repeatedly say that, on Jacobi's view, the attempt to explain the world leads to the annihilation of the world. There is obviously a sense in which Jacobi's view should not be taken literally: presumably, the world will remain whether we try to explain it or not. Yet for Jacobi, Spinoza, and the rationalists more generally, commitment to the principle of sufficient reason has metaphysical, ontological significance: it leads to a form of monism, and as we will see in chapter 4, it possibly leads beyond monism. Whether we believe that these claims are only claims about our *conception* of the world partly depends on how we understand what we are doing when we are doing metaphysics: Are we just talking about our conception of the world, or are we trying to describe its very nature?

foundation.⁵ In doing so, I highlight largely overlooked parallels between Jacobi's so-called philosophy of faith and Kant's prioritizing of the practical. Noting these parallels helps clarify both Jacobi's philosophical contribution and the manner in which the post-Kantian German Idealists understood Kant's conception of the relationship and conflict between theoretical and practical reason. While in his early works Jacobi objected to the nihilistic consequences of Kant's critical philosophy, in his late works he found in the doctrine of the primacy of practical reason in Kant's second *Critique* confirmation for his own attempt to awaken philosophers from their false rationalism. Jacobi's late appreciation of Kant's central insights enabled some post-Kantian philosophers to take Kant's critical revolution further by establishing the primacy of reason in its practical use.⁶

1. Jacobi's Objection to Transcendental Idealism

Jacobi raised his main objection to Kant's critical, or transcendental, philosophy in the supplement to the 1787 edition of his treatise *David Hume on Faith, or Idealism and Realism*. The supplement is historically important because it set the stage for the reception of Kant's critical philosophy by providing influential interpretations of its central doctrines and diagnosing its perceived shortcomings. Yet, I will argue that the text is also conceptually important because it distills the essence of Jacobi's critique of philosophical rationalism. Thus, even if we disagree with Jacobi's interpretation of Kant, we can still turn to

⁵ Among contemporary Anglophone scholars, Frederick Beiser sometimes places Jacobi in the irrationalist camp. See Beiser (1987), 81. George di Giovanni, Terry Pinkard, and Paul Franks provide more nuanced views. See di Giovanni (2009), 49; Pinkard (2002), 91; Franks (2000), 96. Fewer contemporary German scholars place Jacobi in the irrationalist camp. Rolf-Peter Horstmann, Birgit Sandkaulen, Gottfried Gabriel, and Walter Jaeschke are among the contemporary German scholars who try to show that Jacobi's critique of a form of philosophizing is interwoven with the attempt to develop an alternative to the Enlightenment's conception of reason. See Horstmann (2004); Sandkaulen (2000); Gabriel (2004), 147–148; Jaeschke (2004) 200–201. This chapter contributes to this recent reevaluation of Jacobi's critical and philosophical intentions. 1815 Vorrede, 378; 1815 Preface, 541.

⁶ As far as I know, only Dale Snow and Christoph Halbig have drawn attention to this aspect of Jacobi's positive contribution to philosophy. See Halbig (2005), 264: "Jacobi oscillates between an anti-philosophical stance that calls for a self-destruction of philosophical reflection on the one hand, and an attempt to secure the philosophical foundations for an undisturbed common sense by providing it with the necessary epistemological and metaphysical underpinnings on the other." See Snow (1987), 409: "Jacobi's *salto mortale* is the first 'practical' solution to the dilemma of choosing between philosophical systems." For a useful discussion of key passages where Hegel, Schelling, and Fichte attribute to Jacobi some of their own central insights, see Horstmann (2004), 42–47. On Horstmann's view, each of these acts of appropriation distort Jacobi's original critical and philosophical intentions. In this chapter, I argue against Horstmann's view.

this text to orient ourselves in Jacobi's arguments against other philosophers. In other words, Jacobi's critique of various philosophers bears a family resemblance that I believe is most clearly sketched out in his critique of Kant. By discussing the supplement to the treatise on Hume, my aim is to put into relief the central features of Jacobi's critique of the form of philosophizing that characterizes the rationalist tradition.⁷ I first offer three related ways to conceive the general features of Jacobi's critique of philosophy, and then I focus on Jacobi's critique of Kant.

On the view of human reason and scientific knowledge that Jacobi inherited from the rationalist tradition, reasons were conceived as "the conditions explaining why things existed at all, and why things were as they were and not otherwise."⁸ Moreover, reasons were based on other reasons in the form of inferential dependence.⁹ Thus, to provide an adequate explanation of a thing's independent existence or specific properties, one had to be capable of reconstructing a finite series or chain of explanations that ended in an unconditioned, properly basic, or self-explanatory reason.¹⁰ Yet, Jacobi claimed that this form of philosophical reflection would destroy the reality of what it tried to explain, and he saw it would undermine the explanatory role of the reasons that were supposed to be properly basic. In his 1799 letter to Fichte, Jacobi clarified why this conception of scientific knowledge meant that, in order to fully understand something, we would have to destroy or annihilate its independent reality, to be able to, as it were, recreate it in thought: "We comprehend a thing only in so far as we can construct it, i.e., let it arise before us in thoughts, let it *become*. And in so far as we

⁷ Jacobi traces this tradition back to Aristotle and sees the same structural features and problems in pre-Kantian and post-Kantian rationalism. 1815 Vorrede, 378–379; 1815 Preface, 541. It is puzzling that Jacobi traces to Aristotle many of the problems confronting the rationalist tradition, given that Aristotle clearly distinguishes *episteme*, or scientific knowledge, from *nous*: while *episteme*, or scientific knowledge, is a demonstrative state, *nous*, or intellect is an immediate understanding or perception of principles that cannot be demonstrated. See Aristotle (1999), bk. 6, chap. 3–6.

⁸ See Franks (2000), 96. Franks contrasts this conception of reasons with a conception of reasons as "context-dependent responses to specific episodes of puzzlement."

⁹ See Pinkard (2002), 94: "The regress argument (which says that we must have some stopping point somewhere to our justifications) rests on the principle that all 'epistemic' dependence (all relations of dependence that have to do with 'grounding' or justifying some claim to knowledge) is always 'inferential' dependence. The basic idea is that if one believes something, then one must be able to justify that belief, and one can justify a belief only if one can show that it follows logically from some other true belief or proposition; the logic of that position drives one inexorably to the conclusion that there must therefore be something that one knows without having to know anything else, some proposition or set of propositions that one just knows without having to deduce it from anything else."

¹⁰ See Halbig (2005), 271: "Scientific knowledge is defined by Jacobi as the attempt to analyze the conditions under which something is possible. At the ideal limit of knowledge we have understood these conditions so well that we are able to *construct* the entity under consideration."

cannot construct it, or produce it ourselves in thoughts, we do not comprehend it.”¹¹ Jacobi also saw that this conception of knowledge meant it would be impossible to achieve the philosopher’s task. For example, if the philosopher wished to prove the existence of external things as *independent* from the subject, what she wished to prove would be destroyed by the activity of proving. Christoph Halbig clarifies the particular difficulty that confronts the philosopher who wishes to provide an antiskeptical *theory* of perceptual knowledge to restore our natural confidence that we are in contact with a real world:

What is to be proved by the realist is the existence and epistemic accessibility of external things as independent of the subject. If we keep in mind Jacobi’s premises, however, it is not difficult to see why anti-skeptical theorizing leads directly to subjective idealism: the content of the proof is obliterated here by the very logic of proving which proceeds by making things *dependent* on the constructive activity of the subject. For the *independence* of this activity is precisely what the realist wants to have. When he has managed to prove the epistemological accessibility of external things against the skeptic, he has *ipso facto* lost their ontological independence and has thus given up his own position.¹²

In other words, once the philosopher accepts the demand for this form of constructive explanation, there is no way to recover our access to those truths that are immediately available to us by means of our perceptual capacities.¹³ The reality of the external world, our sense of our own freedom, and our belief in God’s existence are three of the examples that Jacobi frequently invokes as these sorts of basic truths.¹⁴ Keeping these observations in mind, we can understand why, in the seventh supplement to his *Letters Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*, Jacobi says that the philosopher cannot reach anything beyond her own fabrications: “We understand perfectly what we thus create, to the extent that it

¹¹ JaF, 201; JtF, 508.

¹² Halbig, (2005), 272. See also Klotz (2002), 34–36; Schlösser (2004), 301: “Nach Jacobi kann sich zwischen der Tatsache, daß ich von etwas eine lebendige Überzeugung habe, und der Möglichkeit, es zu wissen, ein Abgrund auftun. So kann ich von demjenigen, auf das ich mein Handeln letzthin ausrichte (JWA 2, 210, 218), von meinem unmittelbaren Bezug nicht auf Empfindungen, sondern auf wirkliche Gegenstände, von dem Du, dem ich von ihnen Mitteilung mache und das in seiner Gegenwart Ansprüche an mich stellt und auch von mir selbst und vor meiner Freiheit, d.h. der Möglichkeit, selbst eine Handlung vollziehen zu können, nicht wirklich etwas wissen, sofern wissen heißt, etwas in die Kette der Bedingungen einzuordnen und darin entweder unter notwendige Gesetze zu subsumieren oder in seiner funktionalen Rolle für ein System durchsichtig zu machen.”

¹³ As I will soon explain, on Jacobi’s view, sensibility and reason are both perceptual capacities. See Halbig (2005), 267: “Jacobi’s epistemology is based on a distinction between three basic epistemic faculties: understanding [*Verstand*], sensibility [*Sinnlichkeit*] and reason [*Vernunft*].”

¹⁴ ÜLS, 20; CDS, 189.

is our own creation. And whatever does not allow being created in this way, we do not understand. Our philosophical understanding does not reach beyond its own creation.”¹⁵ Because our philosophical understanding cannot reach beyond its own fabrications, Jacobi argues in the supplement to the 1787 edition of his treatise *David Hume on Faith*, that philosophy is nothing more than a form of “speculative egoism.”¹⁶

We can also shed light on Jacobi’s critique of philosophy by explaining why, on his view, the relentless demand for explanation brings the basic or unconditioned reasons that ground human knowledge within the domain of reasons that are conditioned, leaving human knowledge and philosophy with no “place to stand.”¹⁷ Rolf-Peter Horstmann helpfully explains this aspect of Jacobi’s critique of philosophical rationalism in an essay on the early philosophy of Fichte and Schelling:

According to [Jacobi] our concept of knowledge has to do with our understanding of something as being conditioned, but the idea of something conditioned leads necessarily to the assumption of the unconditioned. Thus it is in the unconditioned that all our claims to knowledge are founded. Because of the impossibility of knowing the unconditioned—knowledge, after all, is restricted to conditioned states of affairs—we can never know what is at the basis of our knowledge claims, and this means that we can never refute the skeptic, who doubts that there is such a basis, by relying on arguments.¹⁸

The first two sentences in this passage set into relief Jacobi’s view that human reason rests on certain presuppositions that cannot be proved by inferential reasoning: these presuppositions are unconditioned because they elicit our immediate assent.¹⁹ The third sentence suggests that if we believe human reason

¹⁵ ÜLS, 249; CDS, 370.

¹⁶ DHüG, 112; DHE, 338. Beth Lord offers an interesting interpretation of Jacobi’s claim that transcendental idealism amounts to a form of speculative egoism: she connects Jacobi’s complaint to the question concerning the status of the claims that are established by means of transcendental argumentation. See Lord (2011), 24: “Transcendental idealism, in resolving the problems left behind by dogmatic rationalism, also reconstituted ontology. Kant swept away the ontology of being and essences, and replaced it with an epistemic ontology. . . . Ontology would henceforth concern actually existing things as objects of possible experience, and ‘being’ would refer to their being posited for knowledge. . . . Transcendental idealism appeared to be an ontology without being—or, alternatively, an ontology that left behind very much in question.”

¹⁷ ÜLS, 1; CDS, 173.

¹⁸ By “knowing” Horstmann clearly means justifying a proposition through inferential reasoning. Horstmann (2000), 129.

¹⁹ As I explain in section 3, Jacobi holds that our sense of our own moral agency and ethical value conditions all of our claims to knowledge.

rests on such presuppositions, then we shouldn't believe that the philosopher's task must consist in *refuting* the skeptic, who questions the validity of the beliefs and assumptions operative in our ordinary practices, including the metaphysical assumptions operative in natural science and morality.²⁰ Since the attempt to justify these presuppositions by inferential reasoning overturns the order of human reason, one of the philosopher's first tasks is to clarify which things do and which things do not admit explication.²¹

Lastly, we can clarify Jacobi's critique of the rationalist tradition by phrasing it in terms of the relationship between immediate and inferentially mediated forms of knowledge. On Jacobi's view, philosophical rationalism reduces immediate to mediate forms of knowledge, or, as we will see in greater detail when I discuss Jacobi's treatise on Hume, it reduces the higher faculty of reason to the lower faculty of the understanding.²² Paul Franks explains Jacobi's view that philosophers invert the proper relationship between immediate and inferentially mediated forms of knowledge as follows:

[On Jacobi's view] reason in the proper sense is a perceptual faculty whose objects are given to it immediately, as unconditional and unproblematic grounds. But, in the name of what they improperly call reason, philosophers demand justification of what ordinarily requires no justification. Thus, the everyday relationship between perception and inference, between immediacy and mediation, is inverted, and primacy is accorded to inference. *As soon as the demand for justification is accepted*, natural faith in perception has been lost and the everyday immediacy of grounds has been annihilated.²³

The last sentence in this passage alludes to the complaint that Jacobi first makes explicit in the excerpt from his 1799 letter to Fichte mentioned earlier: the complaint that philosophy necessarily leads to nihilism.²⁴ I will discuss further the significance of Jacobi's nihilism complaint in the next section when I clarify the

²⁰ See Franks (2005a), 209. Franks believes that because the premise of what he calls a "progressive transcendental argument"—of which a prime example is the Deduction of Freedom in the second *Critique*—will be subject to skeptical doubt, we cannot use this form of argument to refute the skeptic. Yet, on Franks's view, this doesn't mean that this form of argument does not provide *any* response to skepticism. I believe that this form of argument provides a response to the skeptic in the form of an invitation to adopt the specific self-conception that the philosopher is offering. I develop this claim further in chapter 3.

²¹ ÜLS, 28; CDS, 193.

²² For a helpful discussion of Jacobi's distinction between reason and the understanding and the German Idealist appropriation of this distinction, see Lovejoy (1961), 22–23 and 45–46.

²³ My emphasis. Franks (2002a), 242–243.

²⁴ See JaF, 201; JtF, 508.

central claims of Jacobi's *Letters Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza*. For now, what I wish to retain from this passage is the insistence that human reason is based on an unconditioned, immediate form of knowledge. Thus, to accept the skeptic's demand to justify those perceptions that ground all inferentially mediated forms of knowledge is to misunderstand the structure that upholds human reason. In other words, to accept without reserve the demand for justification is to fail to distinguish between two uses of reason. What Jacobi calls reason, in the proper sense, is an immediate perceptual faculty; what everyone else calls reason (*Vernunft*), and what Jacobi calls the understanding (*Verstand*), is an inferential faculty of concepts. On Jacobi's view, reason, in the proper sense, is what enables the activity of the understanding.²⁵

Now that we have in view these three related ways to conceive the general features of Jacobi's critique of philosophy, each of which conveys the idea that philosophy annihilates the reality and independent existence of what it tries to explain, we are prepared to see how Kant's transcendental idealism—at least as Jacobi understood it—fared. The interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism that Jacobi provides in the supplement to his treatise on Hume is based on the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which was the only one available at the time. It relates to the fourth paralogism of pure reason, which seems to permit a phenomenalist, Berkeleyan reading of Kant. On this reading, the aim of Kant's idealism is to reject some form of representationalism.²⁶

If we define phenomenism as the theory that physical objects are nothing over and beyond logical constructions out of sense data, the passages from the fourth paralogism that Jacobi cites in support of his interpretation of the central doctrines of the first *Critique* indeed seem to place Kant within the phenomenalist camp.²⁷ For instance, Jacobi cites the following passage from the fourth paralogism:

The transcendental idealist . . . may be an empirical realist . . . he may admit the existence of matter without going outside his mere

²⁵ This comes close to a claim that Hegel makes in the *Heidelberg Writings* about the nature of intellectual intuition. HJL, 10; HW, 7. Hegel's review of Jacobi's collected works was written after his severe criticism of Jacobi in *Faith and Knowledge*. In section 3, we will see how Jacobi's conception of the structure of human reason reveals the relationship between reason and value, or the relationship between reason and commitment.

²⁶ DHüG, 104; DHF, 332. Among contemporary interpreters, James Van Cleve seems to come closest to this interpretation of Kant's transcendental idealism. See Van Cleve (1999). For a critique of Van Cleve's interpretation of Kant's idealism, see Ameriks (2003), 196–202.

²⁷ See Armstrong (1961), 51: "Phenomenalism, we shall take it, is the assertion that the physical world is a construction out of sense-impressions actual and possible, or is nothing over-and-above sense-impressions actual and possible, in the sense that nations are constructions out of their nationals or are nothing over-and-above their nationals."

self-consciousness. . . . For he considers this matter and even its inner possibility to be appearance merely; and appearance, if separated from our sensibility, is nothing.²⁸

At first blush it does seem what Kant means here is that the transcendental idealist can be an empirical realist because objects, appearances, are nothing more than constructions out of sense data: it is for this reason that the transcendental idealist does not need to go outside of her self-consciousness in order to admit the existence of matter. Moreover, the passage that Jacobi cites immediately after this one does seem to provide textual evidence that Kant's aim is to reject some form of representationalism:

For if we regard outer appearances as representations produced in us by their objects, and if these objects be things existing in themselves outside us, it is indeed impossible to see how we can come to know the existence of the objects otherwise than by inference from the effect to the cause; and this being so, it must always remain doubtful whether the cause in question be in us or outside us.²⁹

The argument that there are no valid inferences from our sensations to the existence of material objects has, since the time of Hume and Berkeley, been the best argument in favor of either a full-blown idealism or direct realism.³⁰ Indeed, as we will soon see, Jacobi believes that the only two options open to Kant—given his puzzling and apparently inconsistent talk of real appearances distinct from things in themselves—are to become a direct realist, like himself, or to become a consistent idealist, like Berkeley.³¹

Although my aim here is not to settle the ongoing dispute about the meaning of transcendental idealism, I do at least wish to provide an alternative to Jacobi's interpretation of Kant's central doctrine by mentioning how I understand what Kant means in the passage cited previously, when he says that the transcendental idealist can be an empirical realist.³² Kant says that he has a set of terms, such as

²⁸ KrV, A370.

²⁹ KrV, A372.

³⁰ See DeRose (2005), 150.

³¹ See Halbig (2005), 268: "One of Jacobi's most important epistemological goals is to show that every attempt to formulate an indirect, representationalist realism proves to be inherently unstable. It collapses into either a variety of subjective idealism which gives up realistic pretensions or—this is the direction favored by Jacobi himself—into his own *Naturglauben* concerning an openness of reality to our epistemic capacities without any interface of 'mental intermediaries.'"

³² My interpretation of Kant's doctrine of transcendental idealism is informed by the conception of the relationship between the real and ideal that Fichte develops in his *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* lectures of 1796–99. I discuss the Fichtean conception of the relationship between the real and ideal in chapter 4.

“outside us,” “real,” or “in itself,” that are used ambiguously throughout the first *Critique*.³³ Sometimes they are used in an empirical sense—within the context of everyday life and natural science; sometimes they are used in a transcendental sense—within the context of transcendental philosophy. I take it that by “real,” Kant means something that is basic in the order of explanation or proof, and that by “ideal,” he means something that is explained by something else. In the transcendental register, something is transcendently real if it is explanatorily basic *within the context of a philosophical project*, and something is transcendently ideal if it is derivative and not explanatorily basic within the context of a philosophical project. Keeping these distinctions in mind, when Kant says that the world of appearances is both empirically real and transcendently ideal, he means that within the context of everyday life and science, the empirical world has a fundamental explanatory role and is not derivative of anything else.³⁴ Yet within the context of a philosophical project, the empirical world has to be explained as the appearance that is derivative and grounded on something else, something that plays a fundamental explanatory role.³⁵

Bracketing for the moment the question whether we agree with Jacobi’s interpretation of the meaning of transcendental idealism, we might still wish to consider whether, if we entertain his interpretation, we will understand something important about Jacobi’s general critique of the philosophical tradition, even if we don’t believe that we will understand something important about Kant. Let’s approach Jacobi’s objection to Kant’s idealism by focusing on the passage from the supplement to the treatise on Hume that is most frequently cited:

³³ *Realität*. See KrV, A373.

³⁴ It is important to note that the “transcendently real” and “transcendently ideal” pair is different from the “empirically real” and “transcendently ideal” pair.

³⁵ I would like to thank Paul Franks for offering this reading of the meaning of transcendental idealism during his seminar on the sociality of reason at the University of Toronto in the fall of 2007. In “Kant’s Idealism on a Moderate Interpretation,” Karl Ameriks interprets the doctrine of transcendental idealism in a similar way. On Ameriks’s view, when Kant uses the term “ideal,” he means that something has a reality “that does not stand on its own,” but instead depends on something else that is “fundamentally more basic.” Ameriks calls this interpretation a “fundamental dependence” or “non-unconditional reading of idealism.” While I agree with Ameriks on this point, I believe that he does not sufficiently clarify the phrase “fundamentally more basic.” One way to clarify this distinction would be along the lines of the Heideggerian ontic/ontological distinction. See Ameriks (2011), 33. It might seem that Kant’s conception of the ideal as a transcendental condition for something else poses a problem for my interpretation of Kant’s use of the terms “real” and “ideal.” For example, if space and time are ideal, and if they are the forms of human sensibility, then it seems that, on Kant’s view, what is ideal is explanatorily basic. Yet, as we will see in chapter 2, Kant holds that space and time as pure forms of intuition are themselves the product of a particular kind of synthesis through which the understanding determines sensibility. Thus, space and time as pure forms of intuition can be traced back to this more basic act of synthesis. I would like to thank Ulrich Schlösser for inviting me to clarify this point.

for several years running I had to start from the beginning over and over again with the *Critique of Pure Reason*, because I was incessantly going astray on this point, viz. that without that presupposition [that things in themselves affect the senses] I could not enter into the system, but with it I could not stay within it.³⁶

Jacobi believes that he cannot stay within Kant's system under the presupposition that things in themselves affect the senses for the following three reasons: Kant (1) holds that human knowledge is always conceptually mediated, (2) restricts the domain of conceptual mediation to the realm of appearances, and (3) holds that the content of our knowledge arises through the *affection* of our sensibility by things in themselves. Yet if we can only *know* that which is mediated by the concepts of the understanding, and if all such knowing belongs to the realm of appearances, how can we *know*—as Kant claims to know—that the content of these concepts results from the affection of our sensibility by things in themselves? How can we even know that such things exist? If we can't know this, then it will seem to us like the content of our knowledge arises from nothing. Shouldn't Kant make up his mind, and either grant the direct realist that we have a form of knowledge that is not conceptually mediated (that when we perceive something we are immediately and unproblematically related to the object of our awareness) or refrain from talking about unknowable things in themselves, and grant the idealist that when we perceive something we are only immediately related to our own sense impressions (that physical objects are nothing over and beyond logical constructions out of these impressions)? On Jacobi's view, these are the only two options open to Kant if he wishes to be consistent in his claims.³⁷

In the preface to the second, 1815 edition of his treatise on Hume, Jacobi makes it clear that, on his view, Kant's predicament is caused by the same mistake that has plagued all "*non-Platonic* philosophers," from Aristotle all the way up to Kant: the mistake we make when we reduce reason to the understanding,

³⁶ DHüG, 109; DHE, 336.

³⁷ See Ahers (2003), 83–113, 88: "He says here, Kant operates on the one hand with *real-philosophical* and on the other with *idealistic* or *transcendental-philosophical* presuppositions. He observes that Kant presupposes on the one hand *realistically* an objective world which is accessible to us through the senses—the 'thing.' But in Kant's exploration of the way we *know* this world, this objective thing changes into a mere *transcendental noumenon*. For without the explanation of the transcendental grounds of knowledge, which changes things into appearances, we cannot know anything. Kant's relating aporetically a presupposed *real world*, which, however, dissolves *idealistically* in a mere noumenon in the context of the opposing transcendental presupposition (Arndt 1994, 58) caused Jacobi to come to the understanding 'that I could not get into the (Kantian) system *without* that presupposition (of the thing in itself) and that I could not remain within the system *with* it.'"

or the mistake we make when we fail to distinguish between the two uses of reason.³⁸ Jacobi explains:

What divides me from the Kantian doctrine is only what divides it from itself too, and makes it incoherent, namely that, as we have shown earlier, it both presupposes and denies the existence of two specifically distinct sources of cognition in man's mind. It presupposes them implicitly and unbeknownst to itself (when it says that the thing in itself is the source of all knowledge). But it denies them explicitly, openly, and radically (when it says that all knowledge must be conceptually mediated).³⁹

In other words, Kant implicitly grants that we can be in an epistemic relationship to truths that are not mediated by an inferential faculty of concepts, but when he puts on his philosopher's hat, he explicitly denies this, holding that knowledge must always be inferentially mediated. We may conclude, then, that Jacobi's critique of Kant concerns the loss of "epistemological immediacy" that the philosophical demand for justification brings about.⁴⁰ If, like most philosophers, we conceive of reason as the inferential faculty, then Jacobi's objection to Kant's idealism hopes to show us that "philosophical reason" presupposes something that is "extra-rational." Or in Jacobi's own terms, his objection to Kant's idealism aims to show that philosophical reason presupposes the revelatory "natural faith of reason."⁴¹ The supplement to Jacobi's treatise on Hume invites us to question the manner in which we understand the relationship between intuition and reflection, or the manner in which we understand the relationship between knowledge that is immediate and knowledge that is mediate.⁴² It conveys Jacobi's view that any philosophical attempt to provide inferential justification for truths that are basic from the standpoint of everyday life necessarily undermines itself and leads to a form of "speculative egoism."⁴³

³⁸ As is well known, reason is for Kant the faculty of inference, understanding the faculty of judgment, sensibility that of intuition. While the claim that Kant reduces reason to the understanding is implausible, it is important to keep in mind that Jacobi uses reason (*Vernunft*) in the sense of a faculty of immediate perception. I further clarify Jacobi's distinction between reason and understanding in section 5 below.

³⁹ 1815 Vorrede, 388; 1815 Preface, 550.

⁴⁰ Franks (2002a), 243.

⁴¹ 1815 Vorrede, 391; 1815 Preface 553.

⁴² See di Giovanni (1992), 420–421: "Yet, it is on this very issue of the relation of reflection to intuition that Kant was to present his contemporaries with the most serious difficulty. . . . Kant clearly wanted to keep intuition as the final determining factor of knowledge. True knowledge consists in the conceptual representation of an object actually given in sense intuition. It was not clear, however, how he could express the conformity of reflective representation to actual intuition without doing so *reflectively*—that is, without assuming as given what is only taken to be given."

⁴³ DHüG, 112; DHF, 338. Franks (2007), 253.

2. The Specter of Nihilism in Jacobi's Spinoza Book

I have claimed that Jacobi's objection to Kant's critical, or transcendental, idealism concerns the loss of a form of epistemological immediacy that arises once we accept the philosophical demand to justify convictions that are basic from the standpoint of an undistorted common sense. Thus, Jacobi's objection pertains to our conception of the nature and structure of justification. In this section, I show that a version of this concern about the loss of a form of immediacy underlies Jacobi's objection to Spinoza's monistic ontology; in this case, Jacobi is concerned about the loss of ontological immediacy.⁴⁴ In order to clarify Jacobi's critique of Spinoza, I will focus on three of his claims: (1) that the most consistent form of philosophy should be monistic; (2) that philosophical rationalism leads to nihilism; (3) that the only way to ward off the specter of nihilism is by returning to our natural faith, or by what Jacobi termed revelation.⁴⁵

Jacobi's claim in his *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza* that "there is no other philosophy than the philosophy of Spinoza" conveys his view that if we commit ourselves without reservation to the principle of sufficient reason, then we must also commit ourselves to a monistic ontology.⁴⁶ On Jacobi's view, what "distinguishes Spinoza's philosophy from all the others, what constitutes its soul, is that it maintains and applies with the strictest rigor" the ancient principle *a nihilo nihil fit*, nothing comes from nothing. As we will see, Spinoza's strict adherence to the principle of sufficient reason is what leads him to conceive of God as an *immanent* indwelling First Cause of the universe.⁴⁷ Jacobi reconstructs Spinoza's argument as follows: (1) every becoming presupposes something that has not come into being; (2) being cannot transcend the world of becoming temporally, since (a) if there were ever a time when being existed without becoming, there would be a reason for this transition, but (i) this reason would condition the supposedly unconditioned nature of primary being (b) if there were no reason for the transition from being to becoming, then (i) this would contravene the principle that nothing comes from nothing; (3) everything that is finite presupposes something that is infinite; (4) the infinite cannot transcend the finite modally, since (a) if the infinite ever subsisted without the finite, then

⁴⁴ See Franks (2002a), 243.

⁴⁵ Throughout this section, I refer primarily to the first two editions of Jacobi's Spinoza book. The first edition was published in 1785, the second in 1789.

⁴⁶ ÜLS, 18; CDS, 187.

⁴⁷ ÜLS, 57; CDS 205. ÜLS, 18; CDS, 187. This is the negative formulation of the principle of sufficient reason. Jacobi contrasts three different notions from creation from nothing: Spinoza's immanent indwelling cause, emanation, or divine contraction. See ÜLS, 18; CDS, 188.

(i) it would be another being that subsisted with the finite, or (b) both the infinite and the finite would be produced from nothing, but (i) this would contravene the principle that nothing comes from nothing.⁴⁸ Thus, Jacobi wishes to show that anyone who consistently commits to the principle of sufficient reason must also embrace some version of Spinoza's monistic metaphysics, which holds that all finite things or modes can be considered in some sense to be God. Again, this is because the attempt to think the unconditioned First Cause as either temporally or modally transcendent inevitably turns the First Cause into something conditioned—since requiring a reason for creation conditions the unconditioned, and since finding no reason contravenes the principle that nothing comes from nothing. In consequence, if we are to think of an absolutely unconditioned First Cause, we can only do so by thinking of an infinite immanent cause.⁴⁹

Now that we have reconstructed Jacobi's interpretation of Spinoza's argument, we can ask why he believes that a monistic metaphysics necessarily leads to nihilism.⁵⁰ More specifically, we can ask why he believes that a monistic metaphysics leads to the annihilation of individual entities.⁵¹ On Jacobi's view, "to be an entity is to be the individual locus of organic activity, determined both in contrast with other entities and in terms of some positive internal nature."⁵² Yet if nothing modally transcends Spinoza's infinite substance, then there is nothing against which it can be contrasted, so Spinoza's substance cannot be an entity given Jacobi's conception of individuation.⁵³ Franks clarifies the manner in

⁴⁸ See ÜLS, 93–94; CDS, 217. One should note that Jacobi is reconstructing Spinozistic monism from the perspective of the finite. From Spinoza's perspective, the transition from eternity into time, or the transition from the unconditioned to the conditioned is not a problem if it can be seen to follow from the infinite's nature. I also provide a detailed reconstruction of the argument leading from commitment to the principle of sufficient reason to monism in chapter 4, by drawing on the work of Michael Della Rocca.

⁴⁹ It is worthwhile to call to mind here how Kant characterizes the two ways in which we can conceive the unconditioned: "Now one can think of this unconditioned either as subsisting merely in the whole series, in which thus every member without exception is conditioned, and only their whole is absolutely unconditioned, or else the absolutely unconditioned is only a part of the series, to which the remaining members of the series are subordinated but that itself stands under no other condition." KrV, A418/B446.

⁵⁰ In chapter 4, I explain Jacobi's nihilism complaint in a manner that is conversant with current debates in metaphysics.

⁵¹ Although Jacobi introduces the term "nihilism" in his 1799 letter to Fichte, he already speaks of the threat of annihilation in the 1789 edition of his Spinoza book.

⁵² Franks (2000), 98.

⁵³ See di Giovanni (2009), 69: "[Jacobi] was unable to dissociate 'personality' from 'consciousness.' Consciousness required, in turn, the real distinction between at least two terms: a subject and an object—ultimately, between two subjects who recognized one another to be 'subjects.' So far as Jacobi was concerned, however, a *real* distinction had to be one between actual existents, and existence entailed radical individualization. A person, in other words, had to be numerically distinct from

which the consistent commitment to the principle of sufficient reason—which, as we have seen, Jacobi prefers to formulate in the negative form, as “nothing comes from nothing”—undermines itself, in the following passage:

Rationalism's infinite substance is not an entity, for it has no contrast, and the finite modifications of substance also fail to be entities, because they are determined only through contrast. For Jacobi, the lesson was clear: The Principle of Sufficient Reason led inexorably to an All that was One and therefore Nothing.⁵⁴

In other words, by avoiding deriving something from nothing, we end up deriving everything from nothing. The attempt to reconstruct *reflectively* and *explain* the origin of the world inevitably leads to the annihilation of the world.

Let me expand on this last claim, since doing so will clarify Jacobi's view that human reason presupposes something that is extra-rational, or his view that the beginning of reflection is not rationally explicable. We have seen that according to Jacobi (1) our concept of knowledge has to do with our understanding of something as being conditioned; (2) the idea of something conditioned necessarily leads to the assumption of the unconditioned; (3) this means that all our claims to knowledge are founded on the unconditioned.⁵⁵ (4) Because of the impossibility of knowing the unconditioned, we can (5) never know what is at the basis of our claims to knowledge, and therefore (6) we can never refute the skeptic, who doubts that there is such an unconditioned basis, by relying on inferential arguments.⁵⁶ In the context of clarifying how the principle of sufficient

all others. . . . [Spinoza's] 'substance' could not be a recognizable individual since it had no counterpart before which it could utter 'I' in a meaningful sense."

⁵⁴ Franks (2000), 98.

⁵⁵ ÜLS, 256; CDS, 372: "The principle of sufficient reason says: 'Everything dependent depends on something'; that of causality: 'Everything that is done, must be done through something.' In the first principle, the 'from something' is already implied in the word 'dependent'; just as in the second, the 'through something' is already implied by the word 'done.' Both of them are identical principles, so that they have universal and apodictic validity. But they are unified through the proposition: 'Everything conditional must have a condition.'"

⁵⁶ See Horstmann (2000), 129. At this point, it is worth raising the question whether Jacobi's conception of knowledge, and the way that this conception excludes knowledge of the unconditioned, begs the question vis-à-vis Spinoza, for knowledge of the unconditioned would be possible if the ontological argument were accepted. To address this question, I will draw an analogy between the main claim of this chapter and the main claim of Omri Boehm's "The Principle of Sufficient Reason, the Ontological Argument and the Is/Ought Distinction," which offers a way of thinking about Kant's critique of Spinoza that has interesting parallels with Jacobi's critique of philosophical rationalism. Boehm notes that Kant rejects the ontological argument because he distinguishes possibility from actuality and believes that we can have a complete concept of a merely possible thing; yet he also points out that this begs the question against a rationalist such as Spinoza, who believes that necessitarianism follows from the principle of sufficient reason. If necessitarianism follows from the

reason and the principle of causality each presuppose the idea that everything conditioned must have a condition, Jacobi also clarifies why we cannot *explain* the existence and origin of the world:

After these explanations, it should no longer seem strange to hear me claim that the actual existence of a temporal world made up of individual finite things . . . can *in no way* be conceptualized, which is to say, it is not *naturally* explicable. . . . But reason need not despair because of this incomprehensibility, for knowledge forces itself upon it, so to speak; namely, the knowledge that the condition of the possibility of the existence of a temporal world lies outside the region of its concepts, that is to say, outside that complex of conditioned beings which is nature. So when reason searches for that condition, it is searching for something extra-natural or supernatural *within what is natural*; or again, it is trying to transform the natural into something supernatural.⁵⁷

The last sentence in this passage points out that the attempt to explain the existence of the world either pulls the unconditioned (what is extra-natural) into the domain of the conditioned (what is natural), or it tries to transform the conditioned (the natural) into the unconditioned (something supernatural). This is because the temporal world is the region of conceptual thought, and conceptual thought is always conditioned by the distinction between the subject and object of thought. If we try to get behind the temporal world to the region that we presuppose precedes thought, we cannot do so *in thought* since the distinction between subject and object is what characterizes our awareness. It is in this

principle of sufficient reason, “the distinction between possible and actual collapses; everything that is possible exists and everything that doesn’t exist is impossible” (14). Boehm’s view is that once we have reached this impasse (Kant seems to be begging the question against a rationalist such as Spinoza), we need to step back and find an “independent ground for taking one position rather than another—an independent reason for embracing or rejecting necessitarianism, for example, or for embracing or rejecting the PSR” [principle of sufficient reason] (16). Such a reason might be found, he suggests, in the idea that “our commitment to explaining the world depends on the moral conviction that the *is* is distinct from the *ought* . . . it depends on the practical conviction that the world *could* have been different because it *ought* to be” (17). Boehm’s suggestion doesn’t exactly attribute to Kant a refutation of the ontological argument based on practical reason, but it does offer a compelling way to think about what is at issue in Kant’s critique of Spinoza. Perhaps Kant’s rejection of the ontological argument is based on the same sort of considerations that Jacobi voices in his critique of Spinoza. If, as Boehm suggests, Kant’s critique of Spinoza is at least partly based on the view that our practical conviction (our practical conviction that the world *could* have been different because it *ought* to be) gives us a reason to limit or understand anew our theoretical commitments, how different is Kant’s critique of Spinoza from Jacobi’s critique? Both thinkers are inviting us to reconsider how we understand the relationship between our theoretical and practical interests or commitments.

⁵⁷ My emphasis. ÜLS, 257; CDS 373.

sense that the attempt to reconstruct *reflectively* the origin of the world leads to the annihilation of the world.⁵⁸ On Jacobi's view, this shows that philosophical reason turns against itself by confusing "conditions of existence with conditions of explanation."⁵⁹ What we should learn from this, Jacobi wishes to show, is that thought that is conceptually mediated is not the only form of *knowledge*, and that the form of knowledge that is conceptually mediated is, in fact, first enabled by another, immediate, and pre-reflective form of knowledge. Or, as Franks phrases this idea: "Particular explanations [presuppose] faith in the explanatory factor they [invoke]."⁶⁰ Yet, as we will see in what follows, Jacobi uses the term "faith" primarily to identify this form of knowledge and contrast it with the products of ratiocination.

It is important to note, though, that Jacobi's objection to Spinoza's monistic ontology is also tempered by his appreciation for Spinoza's key insight that the Absolute cannot be apprehended reflectively, through any process of ratiocination, but that such apprehension must be achieved through *intuition* or *insight*. Jacobi makes it clear that his critique of philosophical rationalism does not mean that he turns his back against all philosophy, but only against a philosophy that has an impoverished conception of human reason. As he remarks:

I love Spinoza, because he, more than any other philosopher, has led me to the perfect conviction that certain things admit of no explanation: one must not therefore keep one's eyes shut to them, but must take them as one finds them. . . . He who does not want to explain what is incomprehensible, but only wants to know the boundary where it begins and just recognize that it is there—of such a one I believe that he gains the greatest room within himself for genuine human truth.⁶¹

Yet even if Jacobi appreciated Spinoza's insight that certain things must be apprehended intuitively, he believed that Spinoza's Cartesian terminology obfuscated the significance of that insight. What is apprehended intuitively, on Spinoza's view, is "substance," which as the highest and most abstract concept is also the emptiest of content.⁶² On Jacobi's view, what is apprehended intuitively

⁵⁸ See Horstmann (2004), 40: "Sie ergibt sich daraus, daß Jacobi 'Natur' als den 'Inbegriff des Bedingten' definiert, um dann das zur Möglichkeit dieses Bedingten vorauszusetzende Unbedingte mit dem zu identifizieren, was nicht Natur ist, zugleich aber Natur erst ermöglicht, und es als Übernatürliches zu charakterisieren."

⁵⁹ di Giovanni (2009), 78. See also di Giovanni (1992), 425: "Philosophical reason ultimately turns against itself because, by confusing its own abstractions for the real, it becomes incapable of understanding itself. It becomes an irrational phenomenon in its own eyes. Philosophy breeds irrationalism; it is essentially 'nihilistic.'"

⁶⁰ Franks (2000), 100.

⁶¹ ÜLS, 28; CDS, 193.

⁶² See di Giovanni (1992), 424.

is not the most abstract concept, but the most intimate content: “being,” and specifically our own being, the source of all our actions.⁶³ If we substitute the term “being” for Spinoza’s “substance,” then we can say that Jacobi learns from Spinoza that being, actuality, or existence cannot be brought to thought, because thought always involves the distinction between the subject and object of thought.⁶⁴ It is against the background of this realization that we should understand Jacobi’s claim that it is only “through faith [that] we know that we have a body, and that there are other bodies and other thinking beings outside us,” and that there is a sense in which this realization is a “revelation.”⁶⁵

In Mendelssohn’s response to Jacobi’s Spinoza book, which was included in the first 1785 edition, he remarked that Jacobi’s retreat from philosophical rationalism “under the banner of faith” set into relief the stereotypical differences between their religious traditions: while Christianity imposes on believers the duty to suppress certain doubts through faith, Judaism resolves doubts in no other way than through reason.⁶⁶ But in his response to Mendelssohn, Jacobi makes it plain that his appeal to faith and revelation does not relate to any of the basic articles of Christian doctrine. Instead, his appeal to faith intends to show that there is a legitimate assent to truths that are not derived from inferential reasoning, and that these truths hold a preeminent place in the structure of human reason. As he says: “But if every assent to truth not derived from rational grounds is faith, then conviction based on rational grounds must itself derive from faith, and must receive its force from faith alone.”⁶⁷ As we will see in section 5

⁶³ See ÜLS, 28; CDS, 193: “I have no concept more intimate than that of the final cause; no conviction more vital than that I do what I think. . . . Truly therefore, I must assume a source of thought and action that remains completely inexplicable to me.”

⁶⁴ ÜLS, 59; CDS, 205: “*Being* is not an attribute; it is not anything derived from some sort of power; it is what lies at the ground of every attribute, quality, and force—it is that which we designate with the word ‘substance.’” Anders Rasmussen rightly points out that it is in this idea—that being or existence is prior to the reflection of thought—that we can find the greatest similarity between Jacobi’s critique of Spinoza and Schelling’s critique of Hegel’s *Science of Logic* in his late philosophy. It is in this sense, too, that we can understand Schelling’s claim in his 1841–42 Berlin lectures that it is in the thinking of Jacobi that we find the beginning of positive philosophy. See Rasmussen (2003), 211–213. See also Kosch (2003), 244–245.

⁶⁵ ÜLS, 116; CDS, 231.

⁶⁶ ÜLS, 115; CDS, 230.

⁶⁷ ÜLS, 116; CDS, 230. In his second introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte makes a strikingly similar claim, appealing to a form of immediate certainty that grounds all other certainties: “It may well be that the chief reason for all the errors committed by these opponents is that they are not clear in their own minds about what it means to ‘prove’ something, and hence they fail to appreciate that every demonstration must be based upon something simply indemonstrable. Here, too, they might have learned something from Jacobi, who has made this point quite clearly. . . . But if all certainty is merely conditional, then nothing whatsoever is certain—not even conditionally. If, however, there is a final member of this series, something whose certainty is simply not open to any further

of this chapter, the central aim of Jacobi's Hume treatise is to clarify his use of religious terms in order to contest both the prevalent conception of the nature of human reason and the prevalent conception of the philosopher's task. We will also see that, for Jacobi, our values and commitments are what hold this preeminent place in the structure of human reason.

3. Another Spirit Than the Spirit of the Syllogism

In the previous two sections, I clarified Jacobi's critique of philosophy by focusing on how he understood the consequences of committing ourselves without reservation to the principle of sufficient reason and accepting the philosophical demand to justify or reflectively reconstruct convictions that are basic from the standpoint of an undistorted common sense. In this section, I wish to clarify Jacobi's critique by focusing on a related, but different, issue. On Jacobi's view, the specter of nihilism also comes into view when we lose sight of the relation to *value* that provides us with a firm standpoint to support and build up our reasons.⁶⁸ Among contemporary interpreters of Kant and post-Kantian idealism, Sebastian Gardner and Benjamin Crowe have emphasized this aspect of Jacobi's critique of rationalism. Drawing attention to this aspect of Jacobi's critique is important, because by doing so we will understand more precisely how Jacobi conceives what lies outside of and conditions rational explanation: our values and convictions, including our sense of our own moral agency and ethical value.

Jacobi conveys the idea that our sense of our own moral agency is what animates and grounds rational explanation when he makes the following claims in the second 1789 edition of his Spinoza book: "If honor is to be *trusted*, and if a man can *keep his word*, then quite another spirit must dwell in him than the spirit of the syllogism." In a footnote to this passage, Jacobi expands on his claim: "Man's reason, abstracted from man himself and from every incentive, is a mere *ens rationis* that can neither act nor react, neither think nor act."⁶⁹ In

inquiry, then there is also something indemonstrable lying at the basis of all demonstration." VDWL, 260; ANPW, 92–93.

⁶⁸ See Gardner (2002), 211–228. See also Crowe (2009), 309–324.

⁶⁹ ÜLS, 116, 116n2; CDS, 347, 347n2. It is worthwhile to note here that even on Kant's view, acting morally does not involve disregarding the impulses that incite us to action, but giving them the form of a universal law. See Korsgaard (1996), 202: "As Kant sees it, human beings are subject to certain incentives—impulses which present themselves to us as candidates, so to speak, to be reasons for action. Among these are our desires and inclinations, as well as respect for the moral law. Kant believes that we are not free to ignore such incentives altogether. Instead, our freedom consists in our ability to rank the incentives, to choose whether our self-love shall be governed by morality or morality shall be subordinated to self-love."

passages such as these, Jacobi wishes to show that if we reduce human reason to inferential reasoning, we simply won't have the resources necessary to answer questions such as whether we are capable of keeping our vows or whether we are free or fully determined by natural laws. Perfecting our syllogisms won't take us out of this mental and practical paralysis, since as Kant's antinomies show, it is possible to think of ourselves both as beings determined by natural laws and as beings who are practically free.⁷⁰ In the following passage Benjamin Crowe clarifies the implications of this limitation for Jacobi's conception of human reason: "[Jacobi's] basic position is that reason, regarded as the ability to discern formal relations between possible propositions, is both practically and theoretically inert on its own. Rationality must be 'animated,' as it were, by a variety of extra-rational conditions."⁷¹ The extra-rational conditions that Jacobi most frequently invokes, the conditions that animate, give urgency to, and enable us to make judgments when our patterns of inference provide us with insufficient resources to do so, are the values and convictions that we uphold.

For instance, in his open letter to Fichte, Jacobi remarked: "I understand by 'the true' something which is *prior to* and *outside* knowledge; that which first gives a value to knowledge and to the *faculty* of knowledge, *to reason*. . . .Where this direction towards the true is lacking, there is no reason."⁷² Here, Jacobi conveys the idea that extra-rational considerations, such as our convictions and values, ground and place limits on what we hold to be rational.⁷³ Moreover, in this passage Jacobi conveys the idea that reason has two uses: on the one hand, reason is what enables us to perceive what he here calls "the true," and on the other hand, reason is what enables us to draw inferences that are based on and

⁷⁰ Dale Snow traces to this aspect of Jacobi's thought Fichte's and Schelling's views that "dogmatism" and "criticism" are two mutually opposed, yet possible, philosophical systems among which we must choose. See Snow (1987), 408: "The *Spinoza-Büchlein* contained the earliest attempt of a contemporary author well known to Fichte and Schelling to set up an opposition between two types of philosophical systems which, by the nature of the fundamental choice between them, are both mutually exclusive and incapable of refuting one another rationally. . . . Still more important was Jacobi's insistence that one system is superior to the other by virtue of the values it embodies; in the case of his 'realistic' theory, freedom and a personal God. Although for the early Fichte and Schelling the opposing systems are dogmatism and criticism, both thinkers betray the influence of Jacobi in their arguments that the system based on freedom is clearly the preferable one, even if this cannot be proven rationally to the adherents of the opposite view."

⁷¹ Crowe (2009), 317.

⁷² JaF, 208; JtF, 513.

⁷³ Again, we should keep in mind that by "rational" here we mean a conclusion obtained by inferential reasoning. It is important to note, though, that in a footnote to this passage Jacobi wrote that the direction toward the true "is at the same time [the] direction towards the good." This should prevent us from taking Jacobi's conception of the relation between reason and value in a subjectivist direction, as if whatever we value is therefore good. Rather, the direction is the reverse: Jacobi is a realist about value, even though such values can only be manifested by means of human reason.

oriented by our perception of truth. In the essay that occasioned Jacobi's letter, "On the Basis of Our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World," Fichte makes a number of claims that show, even if he and Jacobi disagreed on the question whether belief in a personal God is unproblematically separable from abiding by the moral law, they agreed on the idea that arguments run aground on our moral determination. As Fichte remarks in this essay, in some cases we can only put doubts to rest by appealing to our moral disposition or sentiment, "and so long as our argument either fails to progress to this point or else proceeds beyond it, we remain upon a boundless ocean where every wave is propelled forward by yet another."⁷⁴ Fichte takes this claim further and suggests that all skeptical doubts—including doubts concerning the reality of the external world—could be put to rest if we fully understood that our sense of moral agency is what grounds all reality. Indeed, Fichte contends that this insight is the key insight of transcendental philosophy:

This alteration in the way things appear will become even clearer if we *raise ourselves to the transcendental viewpoint*. . . . Our world is the material of our duty made sensible. This is the truly real element in things, the true, basic stuff of all appearances. The compulsion with which belief in the reality of the world forces itself upon us is a moral compulsion—the only kind of compulsion that is possible for a free being. . . . The principle of such belief can appropriately be described as "revelation."⁷⁵

We will see in section 5 that Jacobi makes an analogous claim in his treatise on Hume, and that, like Fichte, he employs religious terminology to clarify his conception of what grounds our sense of reality. In doing so, both thinkers suggest that there is a sense in which religious commitment exemplifies human rationality.

4. I Extricate Myself from the Problem through a *Salto Mortale*

On Jacobi's view, our values and convictions are what lie outside of and condition rational explanation, so I want to raise anew the question whether Jacobi's *salto mortale*, or leap of faith, amounts to a form of irrationalism. The source of

⁷⁴ ÜGGW, 352; OBBW, 148. As we will see in greater detail in chapter 3 when I discuss the Deduction of Freedom in Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, the arguments that support the postulates of practical reason start by making a first-personal appeal to our conception of ourselves as moral agents.

⁷⁵ ÜGGW, 353–354; OBBW, 149–150; my emphasis.

this debate is Jacobi's claim in his Spinoza letters that, even though he concedes from a philosophical standpoint Spinoza's pantheism is the most consistent metaphysical system, he nonetheless believes "in an intelligent personal cause of the world" and extricates himself from the nihilistic and fatalistic consequences of Spinoza's metaphysics through a *salto mortale*.⁷⁶ Based on this claim, a coterie of interpreters from Jacobi's time up to the present have found it safe to dismiss Jacobi's position by branding him an irrationalist.

Kant is no exception. In "What Is Orientation in Thinking," which was Kant's contribution to the Spinoza controversy that Jacobi initiated in his Spinoza letters, Kant clearly sees that what is at stake in the debate between Mendelssohn and Jacobi concerning Lessing's alleged Spinozism is nothing other than "the authority of reason."⁷⁷ In this essay, Kant warns us that if we deny reason its right "to make the initial pronouncement in matters relating to supra-sensory objects such as the existence of God and the world hereafter," the way will be "wide open for every kind of zealotry, superstition, and even atheism."⁷⁸ On first glance, it seems like this is precisely the direction Jacobi is leading us in. Yet even Kant expresses a reservation when he passes judgment on Jacobi. He says that he is not certain whether Jacobi's attempt to overthrow the authority of reason "affects only *rational insight* and knowledge (in view of the supposed strength of speculation), or whether even *rational belief* is also rejected in favor of an alternative belief which anyone can fashion as he pleases."⁷⁹ On Kant's view, a rational belief is one to which we assent based on an interest or "*need of reason*."⁸⁰ Such a belief lies between knowledge and opinion: there are no data that we could accumulate to demonstrate the truth of the belief—and by doing so, turn our belief into knowledge—yet we assent to the belief based on a need of reason in its practical use, which "consists in the formulation of moral laws."⁸¹ Assenting to

⁷⁶ I explain below why Jacobi says that Spinoza's metaphysics is nihilistic and fatalistic. ÜLS, 20; CDS, 189.

⁷⁷ WhDo, 8:134.

⁷⁸ WhDo, 8:143.

⁷⁹ WhDo. 8:143–144,

⁸⁰ WhDo, 8:140. I explain in greater detail what Kant means by a rational belief in chapter 3.

⁸¹ To illustrate this point, Kant contrasts a rational belief with a historical belief: in the case of the historical belief that a certain event has taken place, the belief can be transformed into knowledge if we can gather sufficient evidence, for instance through the strength of testimonies. See WhDo, 8:141–42n: "Firmness of belief requires a consciousness that the belief is unalterable. Now I can be wholly certain that no one will be able to refute the proposition 'There is a God'; for where could anyone attain such an insight? Rational belief is therefore not the same as historical belief, for in the latter case, it is always possible that opposite evidence may be found, and one must always reserve the right to change one's opinion in the light of increased knowledge of the matters in question." WhDo, 8:139–140. In the first *Critique*, Kant distinguishes knowledge from belief and opinion as follows: "Having an opinion is taking something to be true with the consciousness that it is subjectively as well as objectively insufficient. If taking something to be true is only subjectively sufficient

a belief that is based on a need of *reason* is different from assenting to a belief that is based on *inclination*, since the latter only provides us with a subjective ground for assent.

If we examine Jacobi's belief in an intelligent personal cause of the world, should we conclude that it is a belief based on inclination? Or should we conclude that it is a belief based on a need of reason in its practical use, when what is at stake is the formulation of moral laws? In the conversation with Lessing that Jacobi transcribes in his letters to Mendelssohn, Lessing seems to think that Jacobi's belief is based on inclination. As he says: "I note that you would *like* to have a free will. For my part, I don't crave one."⁸² In order to address the question whether we may regard Jacobi's belief in an intelligent and personal cause of the world as a belief that is based on a need of reason, we need to consider Jacobi's argument that Spinoza's monistic metaphysics leads not only to nihilism but also to fatalism, and that this is a sufficient reason to reject his metaphysics.

Put simply, Jacobi believes that Spinoza's monistic ontology leads to fatalism because he holds that having some positive internal nature—by which we can be the individual locus of activity—is necessary for the exercise of freedom. Yet we have seen that substance monism commits us to the view that all properties of empirical items are determined through a relational framework. So Spinoza's metaphysics denies the existence and independent subsistence of individual entities. Jacobi phrases this objection by saying that Spinoza's monistic ontology obligates us to reduce all causal explanation to efficient causation: "If there are only efficient, but no final, causes, then the only function that the faculty of thought has in the whole of nature is that of *observer*; its proper business is to accompany the mechanism of the efficient causes."⁸³ This passage shows that, given Jacobi's conception of the ontological requirements for the exercise of freedom, reducing causal explanation to efficient causation leads to fatalism. Yet it does not explain why, if we commit ourselves to a monistic ontology, we must reduce all causal explanation to efficient causation. This is because, on Jacobi's view, personality consists of understanding and will, and both require an object distinct from itself. Yet if all that exists is a single undifferentiated infinity, the first cause must be impersonal and could not have acted in accordance with final causes. In light of the consequences of upholding Spinoza's metaphysical framework,

and is at the same time held to be objectively insufficient, then it is called believing. Finally, when taking something to be true is both subjectively and objectively sufficient it is called knowing." KrV, A823/B851. In the second *Critique*, Kant clarifies that assenting to a belief based on a need of reason is not the same as assenting to a belief based on inclination; the latter merely provides a subjective ground for assent. See KpV, 5:143n.

⁸² My emphasis. ÜLS, 21; CDS, 189.

⁸³ ÜLS, 20–21; CDS, 189.

Jacobi concludes: “The whole thing comes down to this: from fatalism I immediately conclude against fatalism and everything connected with it.”⁸⁴ Even if we agree with Jacobi that Spinoza’s metaphysical framework leads to fatalism, does that constitute a valid *reason* for rejecting the framework? How might we reconstruct the argument supporting Jacobi’s rejection?

Let me introduce a brief parenthesis that will give us the tools to answer this question. In *Kant’s Moral Religion*, Allen Wood proposes that we reconstruct Kant’s arguments for the postulates of practical reason in the second *Critique* by giving them the form of what he calls an “*absurdum practicum*.”⁸⁵ The argument supporting Jacobi’s rejection of Spinoza’s monistic ontology has a similar form. Just as a *reductio ad absurdum* is an argument that establishes a claim by deriving an absurdity from its denial, an *absurdum practicum* is an argument that establishes a claim by deriving an absurdity—not a logical absurdity, but a practical one—from its denial.⁸⁶ Thus, we may reconstruct Jacobi’s argument against Spinoza’s metaphysics as follows: (1) if I accept substance monism, I can be made to deny my belief in a personal God and freedom; (2) hardly any human intellect could countenance this conclusion; (3) I reject substance monism.

It is worthwhile to pause and expand the second premise, since doing so will help us decide if Jacobi’s belief is based on an interest of reason in its practical use or if it is based on an inclination, keeping in mind that only the former can be considered a rational belief. A human intellect could not countenance the denial of freedom, for to be an intelligent agent is to formulate laws that govern our actions. Yet if this is so, then how should we respond to Lessing’s claim that he doesn’t “crave a free will.”⁸⁷ If we don’t want to deny that Lessing is a human being, and if we believe that he can say this to Jacobi in all seriousness, then it seems that we commit ourselves to the view that Jacobi’s belief is, after all, merely based on inclination. In this case, Kant should be less reserved in his judgment and conclude that Jacobi is indeed rejecting rational belief “in favor of an alternative belief which anyone can fashion as he pleases.”⁸⁸ Or, perhaps we should respond to Lessing’s claim by telling him that if he doesn’t “crave a free will,” then he doesn’t fully understand what being human involves. This might hold, unless Lessing defended himself by showing us that there is a form of Spinozism that supports a specific conception of human freedom.⁸⁹

⁸⁴ ÜLS, 20; CDS, 189.

⁸⁵ Wood (2009), 156.

⁸⁶ In chapter 3, I argue that we can establish a claim by showing that its denial would involve a form of self-contradiction.

⁸⁷ ÜLS, 21; CDS, 189.

⁸⁸ WhDo, 8:144.

⁸⁹ As we will see in chapter 5, articulating such a view is one of Schelling’s aims in his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809).

If we now close the parenthesis and return to the question whether Jacobi's *salto mortale* or leap of faith amounts to a form of irrationalism, we can conclude that Jacobi's aim is not to overthrow reason, but to restore reason by establishing the primacy of reason in its practical use. Dale Snow has claimed that Jacobi's *salto mortale* is the first practical solution to what appears to be a purely theoretical question—namely, the question whether we are free, and the related question whether Spinoza's monistic ontology accurately portrays the universe and our place in it.⁹⁰ As Snow says:

Jacobi's *salto mortale* is the first “practical” solution to the dilemma of choosing between philosophical systems; rationalism is not rejected on theoretical grounds, but rather because it denies freedom and knowledge of a personal God. One must rescue oneself from these consequences by means of an irrational “leap,” even if it be “head-first.”⁹¹

While I agree with Snow that Jacobi's leap may be considered the first practical solution to the dilemma of choosing between two possible but irreconcilable philosophical systems, I don't agree with Snow that the leap is irrational.⁹² Rather, the leap is a move that makes room for human reason, which has both a theoretical and practical employment. Or as Kant might have said, had he read Jacobi more closely, Jacobi's leap is the move of a thinker who is well oriented in human thought, who uses a given direction—the direction pointed out by a need “which is inherent in [practical] reason”—to align the needle of his mental compass.⁹³ Only after having thus oriented himself does he judge which reasons count for or against assenting to a particular belief. Jacobi's leap shows us that what would be irrational, what would invert the proper order of human reason, would be to deny the interests of reason in its practical use in order to satisfy the demands of reason in its theoretical use, in its use as an inferential faculty. As Jacobi remarks: “For once one has fallen in love with certain explanations,

⁹⁰ Unlike Karl Ameriks, who holds that the “practical foundation” of a philosophical system is irreducibly moral, I believe that we should understand the first principle or starting point of a philosophical system as our conception of human freedom. See Ameriks (2000), 193.

⁹¹ Snow (1987), 409.

⁹² In the introduction to *Creating the Kingdom of Ends*, Christine Korsgaard surprises us with the suggestion that a philosophical system in its entirety is postulated in freedom: “Philosophers are at their best when the task is the internal development of a philosophical position into a plausible and systematic view. . . . Deep disagreements among good philosophers spring from large-scale differences of approach and outlook; these are what are really at stake. This conception of the subject makes determining the choice among opposing philosophical positions both more difficult and more interesting. . . . The correct view is not going to be the one left standing when the contradictions and absurdities of all the others have finally been exposed. It is going to be the one that answers best to the human concerns which motivate the study of philosophy in the first place.” Korsgaard (1996), xiii.

⁹³ WhDo, 8:136.

one accepts blindly every consequence that can be drawn from an inference that one cannot invalidate—even if one must walk on one’s head.”⁹⁴ This passage indicates that, on Jacobi’s view, to privilege the interests of reason in its theoretical use over the interests of reason in its practical use, and so to accept without reserve all the consequences that we are led to by valid inferences, even if these consequences include abandoning the beliefs that support our everyday practices, is to get things upside down. If we have been walking on our head, Jacobi’s leap invites us to straighten our gait.⁹⁵

Jacobi makes it plain that his *salto mortale* does not amount to a form of irrationalism when he replies to Mendelssohn’s uncharacteristically insulting claim that his leap is unsurprising, coming from a Christian. Jacobi replies to Mendelssohn’s claim by saying that the form of certainty that is connected to some of our beliefs, including religious beliefs, is immediate; that this form of certainty “excludes all proofs”; and that “conviction by proofs is [only] certainty at second hand.”⁹⁶ Yet he also goes on to say that even if these beliefs start off as immediate certainties, they turn into conviction by being sustained through a particular form of life: “This therefore is the spirit of my religion: Man becomes aware of God through a godly life.”⁹⁷ As Benjamin Crowe points out, this form of conviction arises through a reasoned process of self-cultivation:

Jacobi’s remarks in the Spinoza Letters make it clear that, for him anyway, the development of virtue requires deliberate effort and self-conscious reflection. He also insists that this process engenders an ever-deepening understanding of God, along with convictions of an explicitly religious nature. It is not that, on Jacobi’s view, one first adopts theism willy-nilly, only later to make the happy discovery that one has made the correct choice. Instead of such a leap, Jacobi sketches a deliberate, controlled, and doubtless reasoned process of self-cultivation.⁹⁸

Once again, we find that Jacobi and Kant might have agreed on this point. In “What Is Orientation in Thinking?,” although Kant distinguishes rational belief

⁹⁴ ÜLS, 29; CDS, 194.

⁹⁵ See Crowe (2009), 313: “This is the import of Jacobi’s infamous *salto mortale*, which, contrary to the common view, does not refer to a ‘leap of faith’ at all, but rather to a kind of somersault perfected by Italian circus performers. To privilege formal demands over the conditions that give them substance is to get things backward or upside down. The *salto mortale* is not a blind leap of faith in favor of some arbitrary, if cherished view. Instead, it is a return to normality. In this instance, this requires a recognition that our sense of moral agency is what gives definition to the patterns of inference that constitute the system.”

⁹⁶ ÜLS, 115; CDS, 230.

⁹⁷ ÜLS, 117; CDS, 231.

⁹⁸ Crowe (2009), 323.

from knowledge—for the reason that rational belief cannot be based on any objective evidence—he also says that the conviction that is connected to a rational belief “is not inferior in degree to knowledge (provided that the person who holds it is of sound moral character).”⁹⁹ The parenthetical remark suggests that a rational belief can have the kind of certainty that characterizes knowledge if the life of the person who holds the belief conforms to what the belief demands from her.

5. The Restoration of Reason to Its Full Measure

In the previous two sections, I drew attention to some parallels in the philosophies of Kant and Jacobi: both thinkers agree that theoretical reason does not have sufficient resources to answer certain questions—such as the question whether we are practically free or fully determined by natural laws; both thinkers agree that it is legitimate to assent to certain beliefs based on an interest of reason in its practical use; and both thinkers agree that the interests of practical reason should serve to align our mental compass. Given Jacobi’s objection to Kant’s transcendental idealism in the supplement to his treatise on Hume, and given Kant’s criticism of Jacobi’s “zealotry” in “What Is Orientation in Thinking?,” these parallels are surprising.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, Jacobi wrote the Hume dialogue shortly after the publication of Kant’s “Orientation” essay in 1786, and largely to clarify, in light of Kant’s criticism, his use of the religious terms “faith” and “revelation.” Yet almost two decades later, long after the publication of Kant’s second *Critique* in 1788, Jacobi wrote a preface to the second edition of the Hume dialogue that was also intended as the introduction to his collected works.¹⁰¹ This work, which was published in 1815, reevaluates Jacobi’s earlier objection to Kant’s transcendental idealism, and it finds in Kant’s doctrine of the ideas of reason in the final sections of the first *Critique* and in Kant’s doctrine of the primacy of practical reason in the second *Critique* confirmation for thoughts that Jacobi had not fully developed in his earlier works. In this section, I wish to clarify the philosophical significance of three claims that Jacobi makes in the 1787 edition of his dialogue on Hume and in the 1815 preface to the second edition: (1) that all human

⁹⁹ WhDo, 8:142.

¹⁰⁰ WhDo, 8:143.

¹⁰¹ See 1815 Vorrede, 382; 1815 Preface, 544: “The *Dialogue on Idealism and Realism*, which was published a year earlier than Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason*, considers only the first, theoretical, part of his system. It objected that the first part leads to nihilism, and that it does so with such an all-devastating power that no rearguard intervention could recoup what had been lost. It was lost once and for all.”

cognition derives from revelation and faith; (2) that we must distinguish the higher faculty of reason from the lower faculty of the understanding; (3) that by elevating reason above the understanding, Kant's critical philosophy brought about a revolution in thought that finally righted philosophers, awakening them from their "false rationalism."¹⁰²

I mentioned earlier that Mendelssohn understood one of the claims that Jacobi makes in his *Spinoza* book—that certain truths must be accepted on the basis of revelation or through faith—to mean that he was urging his readers to accept without question the central tenets of Christianity.¹⁰³ In the Hume dialogue, Jacobi addresses the charge that he is "trying to reduce everything to faith in the positive dogmas of religion" and clarifies his unusual use of religious terms in his earlier works.¹⁰⁴ Jacobi explains that his use of the term "faith" in order to characterize our epistemic relationship toward the external world, toward others, and toward our own freedom, does not stem from a need of his own, but from the need of a philosophy according to which anything that is not derived from inferential reasoning does not amount to certain knowledge. As he says, according to this form of philosophizing, "Every cognition that does not originate in rational sources is 'faith.'"¹⁰⁵ Yet by appealing to Hume to support his use of the term "faith" in order to characterize an epistemic state, Jacobi shows that what he means is nothing more than the lively conviction that we have when, for instance, we see one billiard ball moving toward another on a smooth table and believe that, upon impact, motion will be communicated from the first ball to the second one.¹⁰⁶ Given that we cannot construct an argument to prove that this is what will happen, and if we believe that only truths that are derived from valid inferences amount to knowledge, then we should use the term "faith" to characterize our conviction. Still, the term that Hume uses is "belief" not "faith."¹⁰⁷ What warrants Jacobi's religious inflection of the term? And what

¹⁰² 1815 Vorrede, 383; 1815 Preface, 545.

¹⁰³ ÜLS, 116; CDS, 231: "Thus we have a revelation of nature that not only commands, but impels, each and every man to believe, and to accept eternal truths through faith."

¹⁰⁴ DHüG, 23; DHE, 267.

¹⁰⁵ It is important to keep in mind here that what Jacobi means by a "cognition that . . . originates in rational sources" is a truth or proposition that is derived from inferential reasoning. DHüG, 9; DHE, 255.

¹⁰⁶ DHüG, 29; DHE, 271. For a helpful discussion of Jacobi's appeal to Hume's authority to defend his use of the term "Glaube," see George di Giovanni (1998). Brady Bowman holds that Jacobi's concept of belief, or *Glaube*, is modeled on the theory of adequate ideas that Spinoza develops in his *Ethics*. Although this is a connection that is worth pursuing, we can't deny that Jacobi cites Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* when he is clarifying his employment of the term "Glaube." See Bowman (2004), 168–171.

¹⁰⁷ DHüG, 29; DHE, 271: "If I see a billiard-ball moving towards another, on a smooth table, I can easily conceive it to stop upon contact. This conception implies no contradiction; but still it

justifies Jacobi's further claim that all human cognition derives from revelation and faith?

What licenses Jacobi's religious inflection of the term and his further claim that "all human cognition derives from revelation and faith" is the idea that there is a sense in which religious commitment exemplifies human rationality.¹⁰⁸ Let me develop this idea: within a religious tradition, certain practices and beliefs—such as ritual cleansing, the recitation of daily blessings and prayers, the preparation of oneself and one's home for holidays—are meaningful only insofar as they form part of a broader interpretive framework to which we are committed. The framework itself admits of no proof, but once it is in place, it opens up a domain of intelligibility within which we can reason and expand our knowledge by building up valid inferences.¹⁰⁹ The concepts and ideas that form the fabric of our framework occupy a preeminent place in human reason, for they are what first enables us to be rational.¹¹⁰

In the preface to the second edition of the dialogue on Hume, Jacobi brings into focus the distinction that he had been trying to convey in his earlier works when he used the term "faith." In hindsight, Jacobi says:

feels very differently from that conception, by which I represent to myself the impulse, and the communication of motion from one ball to another. . . . Belief is the true and proper name of this feeling."

¹⁰⁸ 1815 Vorrede, 375; 1815 Preface, 538.

¹⁰⁹ I don't believe that this means that we cannot judge between different interpretive frameworks and the communal lives that they sustain.

¹¹⁰ Once again, Jacobi wishes to show that if we invert this order of human reason and accept the demand to prove the concepts and ideas that first open up a domain of intelligibility, we will end up annihilating the conditions that enable us to conceive anything at all. See 1815 Vorrede, 425; 1815 Preface, 583: "The moment man sought to prove scientifically the veracity of our representations of an immaterial world that exists beyond them, to prove the substantiality of the human spirit, and of a free Author of this universe who is however distinct from it, of a Providence conscious of its rule . . . the moment he tried this, the object likewise disappeared before the eyes of the demonstrators. They were left with merely logical phantoms. And in this way they discovered nihilism." Gottfried Gabriel (2004) focuses on this aspect of Jacobi's epistemology to draw interesting parallels between Jacobi's and Wittgenstein's late philosophy. See Gabriel (2004). The comparison with Wittgenstein helps clarify how we can accept the view that framework beliefs admit of no proof, but still hold onto the idea that we can judge between different interpretive frameworks and the communal lives that they sustain. As Paul Franks points out, in his 1938 lectures on religious belief, Wittgenstein offers "grammatical" descriptions of religious belief, but "[we] could not understand the characterization of a description of usage as grammatical unless [we] could understand how that description could figure in criticism of some usage as ungrammatical. Indeed, Wittgenstein may be making such criticisms at two places in the notes. First, when Wittgenstein reports that, during the First World War, he saw consecrated bread being brought to the front in chromium steel. This struck him as ludicrous; he may perhaps mean that such an action is ungrammatical, given the grammar of belief in the consecration of the bread," Franks (2005b), 143.

What the author now objects to in this Dialogue, which was an early work, is that he still does not distinguish between understanding and reason in it with all the sharpness and determinateness he achieved in his later writings. As long as he failed to do this, he continued to be embarrassed by the ambiguity of the word “reason,” and had to get rid of that ambiguity before he could achieve his aim. At that stage he still could not give a proper philosophical bearing to his fundamental doctrine of a power of faith that surpasses the faculty of demonstrative science.¹¹¹

In other words, in his earlier works—including the Spinoza book, the dialogue on Hume, the supplement on transcendental idealism, and the letter to Fichte—Jacobi had been led astray by his contemporaries and called reason (the faculty of immediate perception) by the name of what he now calls the understanding (the faculty of reflection). Now he can correct his mistake and clarify for us that what he had intended to do all along was to “restore reason [to] its full measure” by calling the *mere* faculty of concepts, inferences, and judgments, by the name of the understanding, and by calling the “organ with which we are aware of the supersensible, reason.”¹¹² Moreover, now that he is no longer encumbered by the assumptions of a false rationalism, he can call this form of immediate awareness *knowledge*.¹¹³ Lastly, Jacobi points out that reason must be considered to be the higher faculty, for it is only on the basis of the deliverances of reason that we are endowed with understanding. Jacobi believes that since Aristotle’s time the proper relationship between reason and understanding has been reversed, and that immediate knowledge has been subordinated to inferentially mediated cognition.¹¹⁴

Significantly, Jacobi now says that he is beholden to Kant for this newly found self-understanding. In the doctrine of rational belief that Kant develops in the second *Critique* and in the related doctrine of the primacy of pure practical reason in its connection with speculative reason, Jacobi finds confirmation for his own understanding of the structure of human reason.¹¹⁵ Jacobi now says

¹¹¹ 1815 Vorrede, 377; 1815 Preface, 539–540.

¹¹² 1815 Vorrede, 378; 1815 Preface, 541.

¹¹³ 1815 Vorrede, 378; 1815 Preface, 540.

¹¹⁴ 1815 Vorrede, 378–379; 1815 Preface, 541. As I mentioned in note 7, it is puzzling that Jacobi traces this problem to Aristotle, given Aristotle’s distinction between *episteme* and *nous*.

¹¹⁵ See KpV, S:146. KpV, S:121: “Thus, in the union of pure speculative with pure practical reason in one cognition, the latter has primacy, assuming that this union is not *contingent* and discretionary but based a priori on reason itself and therefore *necessary*. For, without this subordination a conflict of reason with itself would arise, since if they were merely juxtaposed (coordinate), the first would of itself close its boundaries strictly and admit nothing from the latter into its domain, while the latter would extend its boundaries over everything and, when its need required, would try to include the former within them. But one cannot require pure practical reason to be subordinate to speculative

that the originality of Kant's critical philosophy consists in unmasking all the different forms that the attempt "to do philosophy with the faculty of reflection alone" can take. Thus, Jacobi wishes to show that by elevating reason above the understanding, Kant "finally bound the Protheus" of this false rationalism.¹¹⁶ In this late text Jacobi insists that Kant's critical revolution in thought finally awoke philosophers from their dogmatic rationalist slumber:

[Kant] destroyed this dream, and by this deed he elevated himself above Leibniz and above all his predecessors since Aristotle.—He destroyed the dream by proving quite decisively that a *faculty of understanding* that only constructs concepts and only *reflects upon the world of the senses and upon itself* if it reaches out beyond the region of the senses, can only reach to the void; and in that void it only grasps its own shadow extending to infinity on all sides. He proved this against false rationalism . . . i.e., against the merely *nominalist* rationalism that mistakes being awake for dreaming, and dreaming for being awake, so that it really makes everything stand on its head.¹¹⁷

This passage takes us back to the objection that Jacobi raised to Kant's transcendental idealism in the supplement to the first edition of his treatise on Hume. Jacobi had objected that the whole of Kant's *theoretical* philosophy leads to nihilism, since, on the one hand, it claims that all our knowledge arises from a domain that lies beyond the inferential faculty of concepts, and on the other hand, it claims that only what lies within the domain of conceptual understanding amounts to knowledge; in doing so, it annihilates the conditions of possibility for real knowledge.¹¹⁸

Yet now, after reading Kant's second *Critique*, Jacobi discovers that Kant's philosophy has the resources to lead us out of the void into which we are led by theoretical reason. By pushing the demands of theoretical reason to their farthest point, and by showing that inferences can never discover the *existence* of anything, Kant also shows us that we are entitled to assent to the existence of some things—or to attach content to certain concepts—on the basis of a rational faith,

reason and reverse the order, since all interest is ultimately practical and even that of speculative reason is only conditional and is complete in practical use alone."

¹¹⁶ 1815 Vorrede, 380; 1815 Preface, 542.

¹¹⁷ 1815 Vorrede, 383; 1815 Preface, 545.

¹¹⁸ 1815 Vorrede, 382; 1815 Preface 544. As we saw above, in the supplement to the first edition of his treatise on Hume on transcendental idealism, Jacobi holds that Kant's philosophy amounts to a form of "speculative egoism." Although Jacobi does not use the language of nihilism there, I claimed that he is still concerned with the loss of a form of epistemic immediacy. The fact that, in the preface to the second edition of the Hume dialogue, Jacobi says that Kant's theoretical philosophy leads to nihilism shows that the nihilism complaint is related to the speculative egoism complaint.

a faith that is rational precisely because it grasps the irrational consequences to which human reason is led by a false rationalism. Jacobi summarizes his understanding of Kant's revolutionary insight in the following passage:

So, this is how the matter truly stands: first Critical Philosophy undermines metaphysics theoretically, for the love of science; then, since everything now tends to sink into the wide open, bottomless, abyss of an absolute subjectivity, it undermines science practically, for the love of metaphysics.¹¹⁹

In other words, for the love of science, heeding the Enlightenment's dictum to use only our own understanding when determining whether we are justified in assenting to certain beliefs, Kant undermines traditional metaphysics. Yet, after showing that within the limits of our own understanding we cannot prove the existence of anything, Kant undermines science practically, or through freedom, for the love of metaphysics.¹²⁰ In doing so, Kant brings us to a new understanding of the Enlightenment's call to freedom. As Kant remarks in "What Is Orientation in Thinking?," freedom of thought signifies "the subjection of reason to no laws other than those which it imposes on itself."¹²¹ Yet to dogmatically impose on our reason laws that undermine our capacity to reason is to construct and choose to live in our own prisons. In this late work, then, Jacobi comes to understand the nature of Kant's critical revolution in terms that aren't unlike Kant's own terms: both Jacobi and Kant show that for enlightenment, what is needed is genuine freedom of thought.

Before concluding this chapter, I want to consider some possible objections to the reading of Jacobi that I am offering. To some, it might seem that my reading of Jacobi goes too far in the anti-irrationalist direction, seeming to conclude with a fairly complete alignment of Jacobi with Kant. I have offered at least three different reasons for thinking that it is inaccurate to call Jacobi an irrationalist. First, I pointed out that the argument supporting Jacobi's rejection of Spinoza's monistic ontology has the form of an *absurdum practicum* and is based on the practical interest of reason, not on inclination. Second, I explained why, on Jacobi's view, there is a sense in which religious commitment exemplifies human rationality: within a religious tradition, certain practices and beliefs are

¹¹⁹ 1815 Vorrede, 395; 1815 Preface, 556.

¹²⁰ Brady Bowman rightly points out that, for Jacobi, our certainty of the openness of the world to our conceptual capacities is rooted in our practical engagement with the world. See Bowman (2004), 163: "Einen Hauptzweck in philosophischer Hinsicht bildet indes zweifellos die Exposition von Jacobis These, der Zusammenhang von Selbst und Welt wie unsere Gewißenheit dieses Zusammenhangs seien ursprünglich praktischer Natur. Der Realismus ist für Jacobi in der Grunderfahrung des Handelns verwurzelt."

¹²¹ WhDo, 8:145.

meaningful only insofar as they form part of a broader interpretive framework to which we are committed; the framework itself admits of no proof, but once it is in place, it opens up a domain of intelligibility within which we can reason and expand our knowledge by building valid inferences. Yet these two claims alone might not suffice to defend Jacobi against the charge of irrationalism. Even if Jacobi's belief is based on the practical interest of reason, not on inclination, is that a necessary and sufficient condition for being rational rather than irrational? Also, if the adoption of a framework makes rationality possible in the first place, then there is some proper sense in which that framework is prior to rationality; whether one calls that irrationalism (since the adoption of the framework is not based on antecedently accepted reasons) or not (since it makes rationality possible) could seem to be a terminological dispute.¹²² Yet I also offered a third reason for thinking that it is inaccurate to call Jacobi an irrationalist. I claimed that Jacobi provides something like a critique of pure reason: only after pursuing reason's demand for complete explanation and justification, and only after showing why we can't in principle meet that demand (both because we can't know the unconditioned and because the attempt to meet reason's demand leads to a form of nihilism), are we entitled to think that it is legitimate to assent to certain beliefs based on an interest of reason in its practical use. This is why, in the 1815 preface to his dialogue on Hume, Jacobi explains his own attempt to "restore reason" by invoking Kant's diagnosis of and solution to the conflict of reason. It is only if we consider these three reasons together that we will come to see why the charge of irrationalism is inaccurate.

6. Conclusion

In every age, what we are able to express is partly limited by the concepts that our contemporaries understand. My aim in this chapter has been to defend Jacobi against the charge of irrationalism by highlighting largely overlooked parallels between his philosophy of faith and Kant's prioritizing of the practical. In doing so, I have drawn attention to the importance of Jacobi's thought for the interpretation and reception of Kant's critical philosophy, for it was largely through Jacobi's works that Kant's conception of the relationship between theoretical and practical reason came to be seen as the central contribution of the critical philosophy. I have argued that Jacobi's concern was not to sound the death knell of the Enlightenment, nor to denigrate the authority of reason, but to expose the corrosive effects of a false rationalism that was wearing away at human thought,

¹²² I would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for raising these questions.

and to redefine reason in a way that would restore our natural trust in our capacity to know and act in a real world among other particular beings.¹²³ While Jacobi considered Kant's first *Critique* to exemplify the nihilistic consequences of philosophical reason, late in life, after reading the second *Critique*, he discovered in Kant the spokesperson for a new form of philosophizing that would be able to build up the edifice of metaphysics on a practical foundation.

¹²³ See Halbig (2005), 269: "We have seen that for Jacobi reality itself is open to our perceptual capacities. This fundamental fact eludes any further justifiability by philosophical means."

The Legacy of Salomon Maimon

Philosophy as a System Actualized in Freedom

If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.

—Henry David Thoreau

Introduction

The importance of Salomon Maimon's philosophy for the emergence and development of post-Kantian German Idealism is no longer being ignored. As Frederick Beiser remarks in *The Fate of Reason*:

To study Fichte, Schelling, or Hegel without having read Maimon's *Versuch* is like studying Kant without having read Hume's *Treatise*. Just as Kant was awakened by Hume's skepticism, so Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel were challenged by Maimon's skepticism. What shook them out of their Kantian slumbers was Maimon's attack upon the transcendental deduction.¹

Yet there is far less consensus on how to interpret most aspects of Maimon's thought, including the nature and philosophical significance of his skepticism and the reasons that compelled him to challenge Kant's Transcendental Deduction of the categories or pure concepts of the understanding in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.² This circumstance makes it difficult for those of us

¹ Beiser (1987), 286. Johann Eduard Erdmann (1848) was the first philosopher to draw attention to Maimon's role in the development of German Idealism.

² Interpretations of Maimon's skepticism can be grouped into a few different strands. Some focus on Maimon's objection to Kant's account of things in themselves (Gueroult [1929] and Cassirer [1922]). Others focus on Maimon's dissatisfaction with Kant's solution to the *quid juris* and *quid facti* questions (Bransen [1991]). Still others focus on Maimon's rejection of Kant's cognitive dualism (Thielke [2001], Beiser [2003]). My interpretation focuses both on Maimon's dissatisfaction with Kant's solution to the *quid juris* and *quid facti* questions and on Maimon's objection to Kant's

who are interested in reconstructing the problems that concerned post-Kantian philosophers to determine what specific lessons the three main representatives of post-Kantian German Idealism—Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel—learned, directly or indirectly, from Maimon. My aim in this chapter is twofold. First, in my attempt to clarify Maimon's role in the emergence and development of post-Kantian German Idealism, I explain the motivation behind two demands that Maimon makes on philosophy and that are subsequently appropriated by Fichte. Maimon demands that all a priori knowledge—or all transcendental conditions, including the forms of sensibility and categories of the understanding—be systematically derived from a single first law or principle; and he demands that any person wishing to inhabit a philosophical system first actualize it.³ These two demands laid the foundation for the German Idealist conception of philosophy's task, which is to meet reason's demand for unconditioned explanation, and its limitation, which is to meet that demand in a manner that does not annihilate the practical certainty of our own freedom and moral vocation. Second, looking forward to chapters 3 and 4, where I explain the Fichtean view that we posit ourselves as particular persons by upholding an ideal or standard of perfection that we regard as the highest norm for our conduct, I argue that by emphasizing the regulative role of the ideas of pure reason in Kant's account of empirical cognition, Maimon enables a rereading of the argumentative structure of the first *Critique* that reveals the relationship between sensibility, understanding, and reason.⁴ This rereading brings Kant closer to Maimon and to the post-Kantian

cognitive dualism. Yet I argue that Maimon's objection to Kant's cognitive dualism is motivated by the rejection of Kant's dualistic commitment to finite and infinite intelligibility.

³ In the secondary literature on the development of German Idealism, most interpreters attribute to Reinhold, not to Maimon, the idea that philosophy must be grounded in a single first principle. Reinhold elaborates on this idea in his so-called "Elementary Philosophy," which he first presented to the public in 1789, the same year Maimon finished his *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy*. While Reinhold and Maimon arrive at the task of systematicity independently of each other, only Maimon develops the view that a philosophical system must first be actualized. As we will see in sections 6–8, to actualize a philosophical system means to commit oneself to the entire metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical framework that it describes. I also explain what it means to actualize a philosophical system in chapter 3.

⁴ While it's obviously true that Kant is committed to regulative ideas of reason, it's not obvious that the ideas play any role in his account of empirical cognition. Many of Kant's interpreters believe it's possible to offer a reading of the *Transcendental Analytic* (where Kant develops his account of empirical cognition) that makes little to no mention of the *Transcendental Dialectic* (where Kant develops the regulative role of the ideas of pure reason). For example, in the second edition of his *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, Henry Allison says that in the first edition of the book he "had relatively little to say about Kant's general theory of reason, its connection with an underlying transcendental illusion, and its ineliminable *regulative function*"; this was because at that time he did not "fully realize the nature and depth of the connection between this theory of reason and transcendental idealism" (Allison [2004], xvii).

German Idealists, showing that Kant has the resources to address Maimon's key challenges. But this reading also puts pressure on Kant's discursive account of human cognition. As Kant famously claims, human cognition requires both concepts and sensible intuition: "Without sensibility no object would be given to us, and without understanding none would be thought. Thoughts without concepts are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind."⁵

Let me further explain the two aims of this chapter. Maimon's demand that all *a priori* knowledge be systematically derived from a single first law or principle arises from his view on the form philosophy must obtain in order to meet reason's requirement of unconditioned explanation. His demand that a philosophical system be actualized arises from his view on the relationship between philosophy and freedom. These two demands are central to Fichte's lifelong attempt to formulate what he calls a doctrine of science, or *Wissenschaftslehre*. Schelling emphasizes this in his various lectures on Fichte. In the Berlin lectures of 1842 published as *The Grounding of Positive Philosophy*, Schelling says wrongly that it was Fichte who first articulated the necessity of a "common derivation of all *a priori* knowledge from one principle," and in his earlier Munich lectures delivered circa 1833–34 and published as *On The History of Modern Philosophy*, Schelling says that it was Fichte who "was the first to propose a philosophy based on freedom."⁶ Yet we will see that these two defining characteristics of Fichte's philosophy are inherited from Maimon, and we will also see that they can be reworked from Maimon's *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy*, which challenged Kant's claim in the first *Critique* to have set metaphysics on the "secure path of a science," enabling it to advance in the company of logic, mathematics, and natural science.⁷

⁵ KrV, A51/B75. As I argue below, Maimon's "rational dogmatism," his commitment to PSR, leads him to reject Kant's discursivity thesis, for Kant doesn't provide an *argument* for the thesis. Responding to Thielke's *Discursivity and Its Discontents*, in the introduction to the second edition of his *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, Allison draws attention to this problem. See Allison (2004), 13: "At least part of the problem is that [Kant] tends to argue from rather than for the discursivity thesis, thereby suggesting that he viewed it as an unquestioned presupposition or starting point rather than as something that itself stands in need of justification. Nevertheless, at least the outline of an argument for this thesis is implicit in the *Critique*." See also Thielke (2001), 109: "For the most part, Kant advances the discursivity thesis as an assumption about cognition and experience, rather than providing any thoroughgoing argument in its defense. This is somewhat surprising, since the critical philosophy is in large part designed to rule out the non-discursive systems of empiricism and rationalism. The lack of an argument for discursivity, it seems, is precisely the problem that led Reinhold in his *Elementarphilosophie* to seek out a first principle of the Kantian philosophy."

⁶ PO, 56; GPP, 128. In *Of the I as Principle of Philosophy*, Schelling attributes this idea to Maimon. See ZGNP, 96; OHMP, 111.

⁷ KrV, Bxi.

By emphasizing the regulative role of the ideas of pure reason in Kant's account of empirical cognition, Maimon enables a rereading of the entire argumentative structure of the first *Critique* that reveals the relationship between sensibility, understanding, and reason, which requires the assumption of an infinite intellect in possession of all of reality and the assumption of an identity-in-difference between the human and divine intellect. On this reading, the representation of the unity of space and time, what Kant calls the figurative synthesis of the imagination, is the intuitive form of the representation of a complete unity of our representations.⁸

1. Rational Dogmatist, Empirical Skeptic

The two demands that Maimon makes on philosophy correspond to two main aspects of his thought: his rational dogmatism and empirical skepticism. Toward the end of his *An Autobiography*, Maimon summarizes his evaluation of Kant's critical endeavor in the following terms: "While [he] holds the Kantian philosophy to be irrefutable from the side of the Dogmatist . . . [he believes] that it is exposed to all attacks from the side of the Skepticism of Hume."⁹ And close to the end of his *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy*, Maimon depicts a number of different possible philosophical standpoints, self-ascribing the one that belongs to the rational dogmatist and empirical skeptic: "If I am asked: who are these rational dogmatists [and empirical skeptics]? then for the moment I can name no one but myself."¹⁰ Let me begin to elucidate the first of these two aspects of Maimon's thought (i.e., Maimon's rational dogmatism) by considering Paul Franks's suggestion that we should understand Maimon's description of himself as a rational dogmatist and empirical skeptic as an analogue to Kant's description of himself in the first *Critique* as a transcendental idealist and empirical realist.¹¹ Franks's suggestion is that just as Kant's transcendental idealism is "in the driving seat" (it is *because* he is a transcendental idealist that Kant can be an

⁸ KrV, B151. As we will see, among Kant's contemporary readers, Béatrice Longuenesse has defended this interpretation. The Maimonian reading of the first *Critique* that I offer, which focuses on the Transcendental Deduction, provides support for a view such as Longuenesse's, which can be reached by independent means, but which is girded by Maimonian considerations concerning both Kant's analysis of the discursive nature of human cognition and his dualistic commitment to finite and infinite intelligibility.

⁹ Au, 284.

¹⁰ As we will see below, Maimon's description of himself as a rational dogmatist and empirical skeptic means that the standards for real thought are available to us, but that it is beyond our power to meet those standards. Tr, 2:436; ETP, 222. Cf. Freudenthal (2003b), 15–17.

¹¹ See KrV, A370.

empirical realist), Maimon's rational dogmatism is in the "driving seat" ("it is only *because* he is a rational dogmatist that he can be—or, perhaps, can only be—an empirical skeptic").¹² Maimon's rational dogmatism essentially expresses a commitment to the infinite intelligibility of everything that human experience includes: all beliefs, facts, and events have a reason, happen for a reason, or exist for a reason. Like Kant, Maimon inherits the rationalist commitment to the principle of sufficient reason (PSR). He believes that in order to provide a grounded explanation that leaves no residue, everything that is conditioned, or only partly intelligible, must be supported by a chain of reasons that end in an unconditioned, absolute ground, and this chain of reasons must render what we wish to explain fully intelligible. Yet Kant also inherits the modern commitment to explain all phenomena naturalistically, through necessary physical laws that cannot be explained in accordance with PSR. This means that, insofar as the *phenomenal* world is grounded in and conditioned by necessary physical laws, it is finitely intelligible.¹³ Kant is able to uphold this *dualistic* commitment to infinite and finite intelligibility because he believes that the first only applies to the *noumenal* realm and is required mainly to explain the nature and possibility of moral action: because moral action presupposes the ability freely to determine our will through maxims whose form conforms to the moral law, although we are *empirically* determined by natural laws, reason legitimately demands that we think of ourselves as *transcendentally* real, free agents.¹⁴ Maimon's rational dogmatism consists in rejecting Kant's "dualistic commitment to two conceptions of the intelligibility of things."¹⁵ This rejection is one of the main senses of Maimon's *monism*. Part

¹² My emphasis. Franks (2003), 201.

¹³ See Paul W. Franks's discussion of the tension between the *monistic* demand that every genuine grounding terminate in a single absolute ground and the *dualistic* demand that physical and metaphysical groundings be kept separate. Franks (2005a), 20: "First, there is the Monistic Demand. This is the demand that every genuine grounding participate in a single systematic unity of grounds, terminating in a single absolute ground. . . . Second, there is the Dualistic Demand that physical grounding be kept rigorously separate. What motivates this demand is the thought that the evident promise of modern physical explanation depends on the assumption of necessary physical laws governing all natural phenomena. This assumption entails the explanatory closure of physics: physical phenomena are not to be explained in terms of nonphysical factors, causes that are not bound by physical laws." For a helpful discussion of the extent to which Kant is committed to PSR, see Longuenesse (2001).

¹⁴ KpV, 5:44.

¹⁵ Franks (2003), 202. Franks explains the difference between these two forms of intelligibility as follows: "On the first conception—which I will call infinite intelligibility—things are intelligible without any limit whatsoever. For everything, there is a sufficient reason, and the series of reasons neither goes on forever, nor turns in a circle, nor terminates arbitrarily; instead, the series of reasons ends with an absolute reason that is self-explanatory, or wholly beyond the need for explanation. On the second conception—which I will call finite intelligibility—there are limits to the intelligibility of things. For everything, there is a reason sufficient unto that thing, but the series of reasons terminates with ultimate presuppositions of intelligibility that cannot themselves be explained." In

of what is at issue, then, in Maimon's critique of Kant is what Karl Ameriks has described as Kant's "modesty," the fact that he is "perfectly willing to allow that various basic aspects of experience remain inexplicable primitives."¹⁶

Yet why should we embrace Maimon's rationalist, pre-Kantian commitment? Does Maimon provide an argument for his position? If we understand an argument to consist in a process of reasoning that conclusively proves the validity of a view and refutes its opposite, I do not believe that Maimon provides an *argument* for his rationalist commitment.¹⁷ Instead, I believe that Maimon hopes to show that his rationalist commitment is the way to inhabit a maximally consistent philosophy that does not force us, for example, to switch standpoints on ourselves when we are trying to regard ourselves as moral agents who also live in a lawful natural world (as the Kantian view forces us to do). If we are able to develop a philosophical standpoint that both frees us from Kant's complicated commitment to two orders of intelligibility and enables us to explain the nature and possibility of moral action, then we should do so.¹⁸ It is beyond the scope of this chapter to clarify how Maimon advances an ethical theory compatible with a form of naturalism and does not involve viewing ourselves as *phenomenal* and *noumenal* selves governed by two distinct series of laws. Yet in what follows I will explain why Maimon's rationalist commitment to infinite intelligibility prevents him from accepting Kant's solution to the general problem of pure reason: "How are synthetic judgments a priori possible?"¹⁹ I also hope to clarify why this commitment leads Maimon to offer an alternative solution to the general problem of pure reason that involves reclaiming some of the classical metaphysical ideas from the rationalist tradition.

the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle describes the immediate evidence that belongs to an absolute reason when he defines the principle of noncontradiction as the most certain principle of all thought: "Some thinkers demand a demonstration even of this principle, but they do so because they lack education; for it is a lack of education not to know of what things one should seek a demonstration and of what he should not. For, as a whole, a demonstration of everything is impossible; for the process would go on to infinity, so that even in this manner there would be no demonstration" (*Aristotle's Metaphysics* [1979], Γ4, 1006a5–10).

¹⁶ Ameriks (2000), 63.

¹⁷ Franks does believe that Maimon's commitment to infinite intelligibility is supported by an argument, yet as we will see below, this can only be a transcendental argument that reveals the conditions of possibility for real thought. See Franks (2003), 205.

¹⁸ For an excellent argument for PSR based on our acceptance of explicability arguments, see Della Rocca (2010).

¹⁹ KrV, B19.

2. Why Does the General Problem of Pure Reason Arise? Why Is It Important to Find a Solution to It?

To set the stage both for my reading of Kant's Transcendental Deduction and for Maimon's alternative solution to the problem that the Deduction is meant to solve, let me briefly review why what Kant calls the "problem of pure reason" arises from Humean skepticism and why it is important to find a solution to the problem. Hume holds that we can divide "all the materials of thinking" into two classes or species, namely, ideas and impressions, and he holds that there are only two ways to understand the process of reasoning that warrants a judgment and turns it into a cognitive claim.²⁰ If the judgment is analytic, in which case the predicate of the judgment is covertly contained in and merely clarifies the concept that is in the position of the subject of the judgment, it can be formed a priori in conformity with the formal principle of noncontradiction—for instance, consider the judgment: "All bodies are extended." In this case, the judgment is true if the ideas or concepts are related in accordance with the principle of noncontradiction. If the judgment is synthetic, in which case the predicate of the judgment amplifies the concept that is in the position of the subject of the judgment, it can be confirmed a posteriori by empirical observation—for instance, consider the judgment: "All bodies are heavy."²¹ In this case the truth of the judgment is confirmed by inductive reasoning from impressions or matters of fact. In accordance with this twofold conception of reasoning, a priori knowledge is of analytic truths and a posteriori knowledge is of synthetic truths.²² Yet we also make cognitive claims by forming judgments that do not fit into this distinction. If we consider any *normative* judgment—for instance: "You should never humiliate another person"—its denial is not self-contradictory, nor can it be confirmed solely on the basis of empirical observation.²³ How then does *normativity* or lawfulness arise? And how can we account for the normative *force*

²⁰ KrV, B19. Hume (2008), 13. In what follows, I sometimes refer to the Transcendental Deduction as the "Deduction."

²¹ KrV, A7/B10.

²² Kant introduces the analytic/synthetic distinction at the start of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, yet the distinction maps onto the two ways of understanding reasoning according to Hume: either through intellectual intuition and demonstrative inference concerning relations of ideas, or through sensible intuition and inductive-causal inferences concerning matters of fact. I am rephrasing Hume's framework by employing Kant's terminology. See Hume (2008), sections 4 and 5. It is worth noting that Kant's knowledge of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* came primarily from lengthy excerpts in the 1772 German translation of James Beattie's *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth*, so there is considerable debate about whether Kant's criticism of Hume misrepresents Hume's views. My concern here is not to settle this debate, but to describe the form of skepticism that Kant calls Humean, whether this form of skepticism corresponds to the actual views of Hume or not.

²³ See Körner (1960), 18.

of any judgment?²⁴ These questions don't just concern the norms that govern our practical lives; they also concern the norms that govern our thought and the foundational norms for all the pure and applied sciences, such as mathematics and physics. For this reason, in the introduction to the second edition of the first *Critique*, Kant subdivides the general problem of pure reason into three questions: "How is pure mathematics possible?" "How is pure natural science possible?" "And how is metaphysics as a natural predisposition possible?"²⁵

Significantly, it is in the *Critique of Practical Reason* that we find Kant's clearest account of the threat that the twofold Humean conception of reasoning poses for the possibility of natural science.²⁶ As Hume points out in his *Enquiry*, all our reasoning concerning matters of fact is grounded on the principle of causality.²⁷ When we think of the concept of causation, we think that if something is posited, "something else *necessarily* must thereby be posited as well; for that is what the concept of cause says."²⁸ Yet our experience never gives our judgments "true or strict but only assumed and comparative universality."²⁹ We can only say that, as far as we can tell, we can find no exception to the causal relation, but we cannot *see* that some factual event must necessarily follow from another event, nor can we reason about this relation a priori. As Kant observes, because of this, Hume concludes that the concept of causation is a "bastard of the imagination": through habit we bring representations under the law of association and "pass off the resulting subjective necessity . . . for an objective necessity."³⁰ Hume does not dispute that the concept of causation is indispensable to common

²⁴ Note that the question concerns the source of the normative impact of any judgment, not only the normative impact of judgments that have norms as their content (i.e., ethical demands). Although Kant does not phrase the central question that the first *Critique* seeks to address as a question about the source of normativity, we can easily see how his question—"How are synthetic judgments a priori possible?"—is a question about the source of normativity. The concepts and principles whose objective validity Kant hopes to establish in the *Transcendental Analytic* are the basic laws of human understanding and the natural sciences. KrV, B19.

²⁵ KrV, B21.

²⁶ KpV, 5:51–52: "David Hume, who can be said to have really begun all the assaults on the rights of pure reason which made a thorough investigation of them necessary, concluded as follows. The concept of cause is a concept that contains the necessity of the connection of the existence of what is different just insofar as it is different, so that if A is posited I cognize that something altogether different from it, B, must necessarily also exist. But necessity can be attributed to a connection only insofar as the connection is cognized a priori; for, experience would enable us to cognize of such a conjunction only that it is, not that it is necessarily so. . . . In this way Hume's empiricism in principles also leads unavoidably to skepticism even with respect to mathematics and consequently in every scientific theoretical use of reason (for this belongs either to philosophy or to mathematics)."

²⁷ Hume (2008), 19.

²⁸ Prol, 4:258.

²⁹ KrV, B4.

³⁰ Prol, 4:258.

sense, but he holds that we are not entitled to apply this rule or concept in order to make empirical judgments expressing claims of universality and necessity.³¹ Yet this leaves natural science bereft of justification. As Kant concludes: “Hume’s empiricism in principles also leads unavoidably to skepticism even with respect to mathematics and consequently in every scientific theoretical use of reason.”³² In his *Essay* Maimon is primarily interested in Kant’s answer to the two questions concerning the possibility of pure mathematics and pure natural science. Yet it is important to keep firmly in mind that what concerns Kant is the more general problem of pure reason. This is because, on Kant’s view, *metaphysics* “[stands] or falls” on the solution to that problem.³³

As we will see, the Transcendental Analytic grows out of a concern for general metaphysics. Specifically, it grows out of a concern for the metaphysical foundations of natural science. The aim of the Transcendental Deduction, the central section of the Transcendental Analytic, is to justify the objective validity of certain general concepts—such as the concepts of substance and accident, and the concepts of cause and effect—that are essential to common understanding and to natural science. The Transcendental Dialectic grows out of a concern for special metaphysics. Rational psychology is the subject matter of the Paralogisms, rational cosmology is the subject matter of the Antinomies, and rational theology is the subject matter of the Ideal of Pure Reason.

Hume’s exclusion of synthetic *a priori* judgments from his twofold conception of reasoning would not only force us to concede that the foundational concepts and principles of all sciences are merely borrowed from experience and the product of habit. It would also force us to concede that moral reasoning should be reduced to “taste and sentiment,” and it would force us to concede that many of the perennial philosophical questions and concerns—such as the questions whether God exists, whether we have an immortal soul, whether we are free—cannot constitute any contribution to knowledge, because the answers to such questions cannot be established by reasoning.³⁴

³¹ Hume offends our cognitive self-image by arguing that the concepts we employ when we make empirical judgments aren’t based on reason, but on habit.

³² KpV, 5:52.

³³ KrV, B21.

³⁴ Hume (2008), 120. As Eckart Förster points out, Christian Garve’s “Göttigen” review of the *Critique of Pure Reason* first made it clear to Kant that a separate justification of the validity and obligatory force of the moral law would be necessary, paving the way for the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. See Förster (2012), 52–56. See Körner (1960), 14–15: “However, it must already, even without looking for such further marks of a science, appear sufficiently doubtful whether an inquiry concerning immortality, freedom, God and other such metaphysical issues can be in any sense a science: for while metaphysicians dispute, as scientists also do, as to whether this or that account gives the right answer to a certain problem, the metaphysicians dispute without even any agreement among them as to how they would recognize the right answer if they met it.”

If left unanswered, Humean skepticism would lead us to regard our being bound by theoretical and practical norms as the product of habit or illusion. Keeping this background in mind helps us understand Fichte's claim in his first introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre* that the aim of the Kantian revolution and the overall task of philosophy are to enable us to think anew the "basis of the system of those representations accompanied by a feeling of necessity, and . . . the basis of this feeling of necessity itself."³⁵

Maimon wishes to show that Kant has not found an adequate solution to the general problem of pure reason—and so has not succeeded in setting metaphysics on the secure path of a science—by challenging, in his *Essay on Transcendental Philosophy*, Kant's answer to Hume's question concerning our entitlement to apply certain laws or concepts, such as the concept of causality, to make empirical judgments expressing claims of universality and necessity. In order to understand Maimon's critique of the Kantian revolution, in the following section I first explain Kant's attempt to justify the objective validity of the categories or pure concepts of the understanding in the Transcendental Deduction of the first *Critique*. On the reading that I offer, Kant is able to deflect Maimon's key challenges. Yet we will see that there are important reasons why Maimon might reject even the charitable reading of the Deduction that I propose, reasons connected to Kant's solution to the question: *quid facti*? The central question of the Transcendental Deduction is what Kant calls the question *quid juris*, the question concerning our "right to apply the categories to sensuously given objects."³⁶ As we will see, Kant's argumentative strategy consists in dissolving the Humean problem by rejecting the Humean view that normative judgments are, as it were, tagged onto descriptions of fact.³⁷ As Robert Brandom explains this strategy,

³⁵ VDWL, 186; ANPW, 8.

³⁶ KrV, A85/B117. Franks (2003), 206.

³⁷ In saying that Kant's argumentative strategy consists in dissolving, rather than solving Humean skepticism, I am alluding to Heidegger's argumentative strategy in *Being and Time*. If Descartes, or Cartesian skepticism, can be overcome only by overcoming Western metaphysics, it is more accurate to say that Heidegger does not solve the problems of modern epistemology. Rather, as Hubert Dreyfus suggests, he "dissolves" them by turning "from epistemology to fundamental ontology" (Dreyfus [1991], 248). Dreyfus also highlights the similarity between Heidegger's response to skeptical doubt and that of Wittgenstein in his *Philosophical Investigations*. See Dreyfus (1991), 151. W. V. O. Quine and Wilfrid Sellars employ a similar strategy in their critique of logical positivism. See Quine (1951); Sellars (1997). It is important to keep in mind that, for Kant, the categories are rules or laws governing a particular kind of judgment. More specifically, they are rules for synthesizing the manifold that is given to us through sensibility. For that reason, I say that the categories involve normative judgments: Kant calls the categories pure concepts of the understanding, but, for Kant, a concept is a law for synthesizing the manifold. See Brandom (2009), 46.

On the side of theoretical reasoning, Hume asks what our warrant is for moving from descriptions of what *in fact* happens to characterizations of what *must* happen and what *could not* happen. . . . Kant's response to the proposed predicament is that we cannot be in the position Hume envisages: understanding matter-of-factual empirical claims and judgments perfectly well, but having no idea what is meant by modal or normative ones.³⁸

Stated otherwise, Kant's aim in the Transcendental Deduction is to show that "everything that may ever come before our senses must already stand under the laws that arise *a priori* from the understanding alone."³⁹ Kant tries to show that we cannot have representations with intentional content if we have not already placed ourselves under certain norms of thought.⁴⁰ We will see that Maimon's dissatisfaction with Kant's answer is due to an internal rejection of Kant's claim that space and time are the pure forms of human intuition, a claim that plays a central role in Kant's argument in the Transcendental Deduction; we will also see that his rejection of Kant's conception of space and time as pure intuitions is rooted in Maimon's rational dogmatism.⁴¹

3. The Transcendental Deduction of the Categories

I now turn to Kant's justification of the objective validity of the categories or pure concepts of the understanding in the second edition version of the Transcendental Deduction.⁴² My analysis of Kant's argument is informed by

³⁸ Brandom (2009), 54.

³⁹ KrV, B160.

⁴⁰ See Förster (2012), 21: "In order to defuse this doubt [that appearances might be so constituted that the understanding should not find them to be in accordance with the conditions of its unity], then, Kant was forced to set a significantly more ambitious goal for the deduction of the concepts of the understanding. He would have to attempt to prove that nothing can even appear to us in sensibility which is not already subject to the categories and hence that the categories are not only valid for the objects of experience but rather for all possible appearances whatsoever."

⁴¹ KrV, A26/B42.

⁴² The charitable interpretation of the Transcendental Deduction that I offer, which places great weight on the idea that space and time are products of the figurative synthesis of the imagination, is not Maimon's interpretation. It is only in the second edition of the first *Critique* that Kant develops the idea that the forms of sensibility are themselves the product of a form of synthesis, and Maimon's page references in the *Essay* usually refer to the first rather than the second edition of the first *Critique*. Yet we will see that even if we grant my interpretation of the Transcendental Deduction, Maimon's criticism is still valid, for we can still raise a version of Maimon's question: *quid facti*?

a set of interpretive decisions. Among these are the following: the *Critique of Pure Reason* as a whole is an attempt to restore metaphysics, understood as the science of the highest causes and first principles; the Transcendental Analytic grows out of a concern for the metaphysical foundations of natural science; and Humean skepticism enables Kant to phrase his own concerns with greater determinacy, laying the foundation for Kant's critical philosophy.⁴³

In what follows I make a further set of interpretive decisions, taking my lead from the framework for reading the Transcendental Deduction that is offered by Dieter Henrich in "The Proof-Structure of Kant's Transcendental Deduction" and by Karl Ameriks in "Kant's Transcendental Deduction as a Regressive Argument."⁴⁴ Both Henrich and Ameriks agree that the main aim of the Transcendental Deduction is to justify the objective validity of the categories or pure concepts of the understanding.⁴⁵ In order to provide such a justification, Kant must show that "everything that may ever come before our senses," everything that may become an object of experience for us, must stand under the categories.⁴⁶ This is the conclusion Kant hopes to arrive at by the end of the Transcendental Deduction. Ameriks believes that the basic premise or starting point of Kant's argument is the fact of empirical knowledge. He states: "It is necessary and profitable to understand the deduction as moving from the assumption that there is empirical knowledge to a proof of the preconditions of that knowledge."⁴⁷ Because this manner of phrasing Kant's basic premise risks being understood to mean that Kant starts from the fact of science, and specifically from Newtonian and Euclidean science, I will claim that Kant's argument starts from the presupposition of empirical cognition, understood as the activity of determining conceptually what is given to us through sensibility.⁴⁸ This manner

⁴³ Kant follows Aristotle in thinking of a cause or principle as the "the first from which a thing either exists or is generated or is known." See Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (1979) Δ1, 1013a17–20.

⁴⁴ Henrich (1969); Ameriks (1978). See also Allison (2004), chap. 7, "The Transcendental Deduction."

⁴⁵ As Ameriks shows, this reading is fundamentally at odds with that of Peter Strawson, Jonathan Bennett, and Robert Paul Wolff, who interpret the Transcendental Deduction as an attempt to address a form of Cartesian skepticism. See Ameriks (1978), 273: "Whereas their interpretations see Kant's deduction as aiming to provide a proof of objectivity which will answer skepticism, I will argue that on the contrary it is necessary and profitable to understand the deduction as moving from the assumption that there is empirical knowledge to a proof of the preconditions of that knowledge."

⁴⁶ KrV, B160.

⁴⁷ Ameriks (1978), 273.

⁴⁸ In the *Prolegomena*, Kant does seem to take this approach, and this is generally the neo-Kantian interpretation of Kant's basic premise in the Transcendental Deduction. If we consider that, on Kant's view, experience is the cognition of objects (B1) and that cognition is a whole of compared and interconnected representations (A98), it seems that Maimon also holds that the basic premise of Kant's argument in the Transcendental Deduction assumes the fact of science. See Tr, 2:186; ETP, 100: "Kant assumes there is no doubt that we possess experiential propositions (that express

of understanding Kant's starting point is in line with his views on the *telos* or end of cognition. In his introductory remarks to the Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant makes the following weighty claim: "In whatever way and through whatever means a cognition may relate to objects, that through which it relates immediately to them, *and at which all thought as a means is directed as an end, is intuition.*"⁴⁹ This passage suggests that, on Kant's view, empirical cognition is a teleological activity whose end is to fully determine conceptually what is given to us. To clarify the decisions informing my reading of Kant's Transcendental Deduction, I have stated what I hold to be the main aim and the basic presupposition of the Deduction.

Like Henrich and Ameriks, I also hold that the argument of the Deduction should be understood as a single argument with two steps. In the first step, up to §20, Kant shows that the categories or pure concepts of the understanding are necessary for any objective representation; they apply to all representations that are unified by being brought under the concept of an object. The title of §20, "All sensible intuitions stand under the categories, as conditions under which alone their manifold can come together in one consciousness," indicates that Kant has arrived at this conclusion.⁵⁰ Yet §21 raises a problem: Kant's aim is to show that the categories are necessarily and universally valid, or that they apply to "everything which can be meaningfully related to experience."⁵¹ Up to §20, Kant has only been able to show that the categories apply to representations brought under the concept of an object and unified in a sensible intuition. In the final sections of the Deduction, which contain the second step in his argument, Kant will show that the categories also apply to representations that are *not* united under the concept of an object but that still have intentional content. Although Kant does not use the term "intentional content," this seems to be the best term to name those elements of experience resting between mere sensations or sense-impressions and sensible intuitions or representations that fall under concepts.⁵²

necessity)), and he proves their objective validity by showing that experience would be impossible without them; but on Kant's assumption, experience is possible because it is actual, and this is why these concepts have objective reality."

⁴⁹ KrV, A20/B34. It is worthwhile to note that, for Kant, an intuition is singular and fully determinate: "That representation, however, which can only be given through a single object, is an intuition" (KrV, A32/B47). The importance of this claim will become evident in section 5, where I explain Maimon's own conception of empirical cognition as a teleological activity governed by the idea or ideal of a fully determined logical space.

⁵⁰ KrV, B143.

⁵¹ Henrich (1969), 646.

⁵² See Ginsborg (2008), 68: "For otherwise the only candidates to be bearers of nonconceptual content are the sensible impressions belonging to 'sheer receptivity,' that is, sense-impressions or sensations. And while these clearly do not depend on concepts, it is implausible to view them as having representational content in the sense that is at issue in the debate over nonconceptual content."

As Kant remarks in the transition between the two steps in his argument, it is only by the end of §26 that the “aim of the deduction [is] fully attained” and that he can claim to have justified the “*a priori* validity” of the categories, “in regard to all objects of our senses.”⁵³

Let’s now turn to the first step in Kant’s deduction of the objective validity of the categories, which leads up to §20 and to the conclusion that “the manifold in a given intuition also necessarily stands under categories.”⁵⁴ In the first paragraph of the Deduction, Kant makes the following important claim: “All combination . . . is an action of the understanding, which we would designate with the general title synthesis.”⁵⁵ As soon as we move beyond a disparate and merely sensible manifold of representations, which requires nothing but receptivity, and combine these representations into a sensible intuition, we are within the domain of spontaneity, within the domain of the understanding. Combination or synthesis cannot be “given through objects but can be executed only by the subject itself.”⁵⁶ Because Kant starts from the presupposition that our experience is that of a body of empirical cognitions, and given that he defines a cognition as an “objective perception” or more generally as a “representation with consciousness,” this first paragraph already establishes that the spontaneous activity of the understanding is in some sense involved in everything that we can experience and perceive.⁵⁷

The second paragraph of the Transcendental Deduction introduces a set of ideas that, as we will see later on, are essential to Kant’s understanding of the relation among sensibility, understanding, and reason. Kant suggests that the activity of the understanding can only be understood as teleological. In the statement: “But in addition to the concept of the manifold and of its synthesis, the concept of combination also carries with it the concept of the unity of the manifold. Combination is the representation of the synthetic unity of the manifold,” Kant suggests that the activity of synthesis only makes sense if it carries with it the representation of the synthetic unity of the manifold. In other words, we only determine our representations and bring them under concepts insofar as we have in view the complete unity of these representations.⁵⁸ Indeed, in the

⁵³ KrV, B145.

⁵⁴ KrV, B143.

⁵⁵ KrV, B130.

⁵⁶ KrV, B130.

⁵⁷ KrV, A320/B377. Here, it is important to keep in mind that, on my reading, the basic premise or starting point of the argument is not the fact of empirical knowledge, as Ameriks suggests, but the activity of determining conceptually what is given to us through sensibility. Otherwise the argument begs the question against Humean skepticism.

⁵⁸ KrV, B131. As we will see, Béatrice Longuenesse holds that in this passage the concept of combination leads to the transcendental unity of apperception, which in turn “generates the *a priori*

first edition version of the Transcendental Deduction, Kant claims that cognition must be “a whole of compared and connected representations,” and in the appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic, where Kant describes the regulative use of the ideas of pure reason, he holds that reason “prescribes and seeks to bring about” a systematic unity of our cognitions.⁵⁹ This unity of reason “always presupposes an idea, namely that of the form of a whole of cognition”; it is only through this idea that our cognition “comes to be not merely a contingent aggregate but a system interconnected in accordance with necessary laws.”⁶⁰ In §15 of the Deduction, Kant only suggests that the activity of the understanding is teleological.⁶¹ What he makes explicit is that we cannot find unity in the sheer manifold of our representations; we must “seek this unity (as qualitative), someplace higher, namely in that which itself contains the ground of the unity of different concepts in judgments, and hence of the possibility of the understanding, even in its logical use.”⁶²

The next section in the Deduction makes it evident that this higher unity that grounds the unity of our different concepts and judgments, is the transcendental unity of self-consciousness. Kant famously opens §16 with the remark: “The I think must be able to accompany all my representations.”⁶³ Each synthetic act of the understanding is an act through which I make a given representation my own by bringing it into accord with my other representations so that they can “all together belong to a self-consciousness; i.e., as my representations.”⁶⁴ It is in this light that the synthetic activity of the understanding can be construed as an operation through which we “bring the manifold of given representations under [the] unity of apperception.”⁶⁵ In the Metaphysical Deduction of the categories,

representation of a complete unity of our representations, whose intuitive form is the unity of space and time” (Longuenesse [1998], 241n57).

⁵⁹ KrV, A97.

⁶⁰ KrV, A645/B673.

⁶¹ As we will see below, Maimon sets into relief this aspect of Kant’s thought.

⁶² KrV, B131.

⁶³ KrV, B132.

⁶⁴ KrV, B133. It is significant that immediately after stating that the manifold of representations must belong to a self-consciousness, Kant makes the additional claim that “my representations . . . must yet necessarily be in accord with the condition under which alone they can stand together in a *universal* self-consciousness, because otherwise they would not throughout belong to me” (KrV, B133). This suggests that the unity of self-consciousness is already tied to intersubjective unity. The importance of the claim that each synthetic act of the understanding is an act through which I make a given representation “my own” by bringing it into accord with my other representations will become clearer in chapter 3, where I argue that being a self involves giving our beliefs and actions the form of a coherent whole, and where I claim that this practice is the means by which we cognize the good (and the true).

⁶⁵ KrV, B135.

Kant describes synthesis as the activity of combining different representations with each other in one cognition. This involves, first, the synthesis of the imagination, which Kant describes as a “blind though indispensable function of the soul,” and second, the synthesis of the understanding, through which we bring the synthesis of the imagination to concepts.⁶⁶ In §16 of the Deduction, Kant adds to this that all acts of synthesis involve bringing representations under the transcendental unity of apperception.⁶⁷ And in §17 Kant draws out the implications of this claim, stating that the supreme principle of human cognition is the following one: “All the manifold of intuition [must] stand under the conditions of [the transcendental or] original synthetic unity of apperception.”⁶⁸ If in the Transcendental Aesthetic Kant showed that the manifold of sensibility must stand under the forms of sensible intuition, space and time, here he shows that the manifold of intuitions must stand under the unity of consciousness.

Once Kant arrives at this supreme principle of human cognition, it is a short step to the conclusion of §20, which states that all sensible intuitions must stand under the categories. In §19 Kant says that a judgment has a more important role than the one traditionally ascribed to it by logicians.⁶⁹ A judgment does not merely establish the relation between two concepts; it is the means through which given cognitions are brought to the objective unity of apperception: “That is the aim of the copula ‘is’ in them: to distinguish the objective unity of given representations from the subjective.”⁷⁰ The distinction between the objective and subjective unity of given representations hinges on the distinction that Kant makes in §18 between the objective and subjective unity of apperception, or between the transcendental and empirical unity of apperception. This distinction points toward the intersubjective dimension of self-consciousness. What a judgment establishes by unifying a given manifold under the concept of an object is that this is an effort to unify a given manifold of sensibility in a way that is not idiosyncratic, but necessarily and universally valid.⁷¹ This is what it means,

⁶⁶ KrV, A78/B104.

⁶⁷ Kant phrases this idea in two different ways. In §16, he states: “Combination . . . is only an operation of the understanding, which is itself nothing further than the faculty of combining a priori and bringing the manifold of given representations under unity of apperception” (KrV, B135). In §17 he makes this claim more concisely: “All unification of representations requires unity of consciousness in the synthesis of them” (KrV, B137).

⁶⁸ KrV, B136.

⁶⁹ For a helpful discussion of Kant’s break with the traditional logical tradition, according to which judging is predicating, see Brandom (2009), 29–49.

⁷⁰ KrV, B142.

⁷¹ KrV, B140: “One person combines the representation of a certain word with one thing, another with something else; and the unity of consciousness in that which is empirical is not, with regard to that which is given, necessarily and universally valid.”

for Kant, to bring representations through judgments to the objective unity of consciousness.

To complete the first step in his argument, all that Kant has to do in §20 is summarize the points he has made so far and remind us of his conclusions from the Metaphysical Deduction, where he derives each of the categories from one of twelve logical forms of judgment. All sensible intuitions stand under the transcendental unity of apperception, since this is what first makes the unity of intuition possible. Judgments bring the manifold of given representations under the unity of apperception. Yet each of the categories has its counterpart in one of the logical forms of judgment. Thus, Kant concludes, “the manifold in a given intuition also necessarily stands under categories.”⁷² By the end of §20, Kant has proved that the categories necessarily apply to representations that are brought under the concept of an object and unified in an empirical intuition.⁷³

As mentioned previously, the full justification of the objective validity of the categories, the validity of the categories “in regard to *all objects of our senses*,” is only achieved through the second step in Kant’s argument.⁷⁴ Dieter Henrich explains that although the first step in Kant’s argument proves that “wherever there is unity, there is a relation which can be thought according to the categories,” it still does not “clarify for us the range within which unitary intuitions can be found.”⁷⁵ Because the categories arise independently from sensibility and have their source in the understanding, they might not apply to the “manifold *for an empirical intuition*” as this is given and before it is unified under the concept of an object.⁷⁶ This possibility is one that Kant raises early in the Transcendental Analytic, when he first explains the general principles of a transcendental deduction. In §13 Kant entertains the following possibility: “Appearances could after all be so constituted that the understanding would not find them in accord

⁷² KrV, B143.

⁷³ Both Ameriks and Henrich stress the importance of Kant’s use of the indefinite article in the expression: “in Einer Anschauung” (KrV, B143) and are critical of Norman Kemp Smith’s translation of this passage as “in one empirical intuition.” As Dieter Henrich rightly notes, what is at stake in the use of the indefinite article is that “the result of the proof in §20 is therefore valid only for those intuitions *which already contain unity*” (Henrich [1969], 645).

⁷⁴ KrV, B145.

⁷⁵ Henrich (1969), 645. Allison differs from Henrich on this point. See Allison (2004), 162: “The difference from Henrich’s reading is illustrated by the different ways in which they address the specter [raised in §13]. As already noted, Henrich suggests that the first part of the B-Deduction removes it for a certain range of intuitions (those that already possess unity), while the second part moves beyond this restriction and removes it for all. By contrast, the reading offered here maintains that the first part by itself leaves the specter completely in place, since it is concerned exclusively with the conditions of the thought of objects; so this essential task is assigned entirely to the second part.”

⁷⁶ KrV, B145.

with the conditions of its unity.”⁷⁷ The second step in Kant’s Deduction revisits the *manner* in which the manifold for an empirical intuition is given, in order to show that it already forms a kind of unity. Moreover, Kant shows that this unity is “none other than the one the category prescribes to the manifold of a given intuition in general,” according with his conclusion to §20.⁷⁸

In her convincing analysis of the second part of Kant’s Transcendental Deduction in *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, Béatrice Longuenesse points out that in order to complete the argument of the Deduction, Kant is compelled to revisit the Transcendental Aesthetic and to reinterpret, “in light of the demonstration he has just provided, the manner in which things are given to us, that is, the forms of intuition,” *space and time*.⁷⁹ Ultimately, Kant shows that everything that is given to us through sensibility is given in space and time, and he shows that these forms of sensibility are themselves products of a particular kind of synthesis through which the understanding determines sensibility.⁸⁰

In the Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant indicates that all sensuous representations, all objects of a possible experience, must come under the forms of sensibility, space and time. Yet by calling the forms of sensibility “pure [forms] of sensible intuition,” Kant also indicates that space and time are themselves unified, for an intuition is both singular and determinate.⁸¹ As Kant states of space: “Space is not a discursive or, as is said, general concept of relations of things in general, but a pure intuition. For, first, one can only represent a single space, and if one speaks of many spaces, one understands by that only parts of one and the same unique space.”⁸² Likewise, “Time is no discursive or, as one calls it, general concept, but a pure form of sensible intuition. Different times are only parts of one and the same time. That representation, however, which can only be given through a single object, is an intuition.”⁸³ Thus, in the Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant primarily wishes to establish that the unity of space and time is different from the unity of concepts.

In the Transcendental Deduction, Kant establishes that the unity of concepts, which he calls the “combination of the understanding (*synthesis intellectualis*),” accords with the unity of space and time, which “can be called figurative (*synthesis speciosa*).”⁸⁴ In §24, titled “On the application of the categories to objects of

⁷⁷ KrV, A91/B123.

⁷⁸ KrV, B143.

⁷⁹ Longuenesse (1998), 213.

⁸⁰ As we will see below, like many contemporary readers of the first *Critique*, Maimon does not think that the concept of pure intuitions that are different from concepts, or that are higher than concepts, which are products of a particular form of synthesis, makes any sense.

⁸¹ KrV, A32/B47.

⁸² KrV, A25/B40.

⁸³ KrV, A32/B47.

⁸⁴ KrV, B151.

the senses in general,” Kant says that figurative synthesis is the “transcendental synthesis of the imagination.”⁸⁵ This section takes us back to the Metaphysical Deduction, where Kant explains the role of the imagination in cognition. The imagination first “collects the elements for cognitions and unifies them into a certain content; it is therefore the first thing to which we have to attend if we wish to judge about the first origin of our cognition.”⁸⁶ It is only on the basis of this activity of the imagination that the understanding can “bring this synthesis to concepts” and first provide us with cognition “in the proper sense.”⁸⁷

In the Deduction Kant bridges the apparent dualism between sensibility and understanding.⁸⁸ Although the synthesis of the imagination “belongs to sensibility” because it precedes all concepts, this synthesis is still “an exercise of spontaneity”; it is an “*effect of the understanding on sensibility* and its first application.”⁸⁹ The synthesis of the imagination is a function of the understanding operating prior to any concepts. In §26 Kant argues that if the unity of space and time is the product of a figurative synthesis of the imagination through which the understanding determines sensibility, it is clearly in accord with the intellectual unity of the understanding: “It is one and the same spontaneity that, there under the name of imagination and here under the name of understanding, brings combination into the manifold of intuition.”⁹⁰

To conclude the second step in his argument and complete the deduction of the categories, Kant only has to spell out the implications of this last claim. Everything that is given to us through sensibility is given in space and time.

⁸⁵ KrV, B151.

⁸⁶ KrV, A78/B104.

⁸⁷ KrV, A78/B104.

⁸⁸ Because Maimon rejects Kant’s conception of the forms of sensibility as pure or formal intuitions, he believes that Kant has not, in fact, succeeded in bridging the dualism between sensibility and understanding. Yet it is important to note that if we accept the reading of the Deduction that I am offering, then, on Kant’s considered view, there *isn’t* a rigid and sharp dualism between understanding and sensibility. For this reason, I disagree with Beiser’s reading of Maimon’s challenge. See Beiser (2003), 235: “The essence of Maimon’s critique is that Kant cannot solve the problem behind the Deduction—‘How do a priori concepts apply to experience if they do not derive from it?’—because of his rigid and sharp dualism between understanding and sensibility.” On my reading, Kant *does* solve the problem. Yet Maimon rejects Kant’s solution to the problem because Kant fails to *explain* why space and time are the forms of human sensibility. As I argue below, Kant’s view that space and time are the *contingent* forms of human sensibility goes against Maimon’s commitment to infinite intelligibility.

⁸⁹ KrV, B161: “In the Aesthetic I ascribed this unity merely to sensibility, only in order to note that it precedes all concepts, though to be sure it presupposes a synthesis, which does not belong to the senses but through which all concepts of space and time first become possible” (KrV, B152).

⁹⁰ See Longuenesse (1998), 216: “If this analysis is correct, we should conclude that the space and time described in the Transcendental Aesthetic are products of the figurative synthesis of imagination, and as such are what Kant calls, in section 26, formal intuitions” (KrV, B162).

Space and time are products of the figurative synthesis of the imagination, through which the understanding determines sensibility. In the Metaphysical Deduction, Kant shows that all actions of the understanding can be traced back to judgments, “so that the understanding in general can be represented as a faculty for judging.”⁹¹ Lastly, the categories are “nothing other than these very functions for judging.”⁹² By the end of §26, Kant can conclude that any synthesis, be it the conceptual synthesis of the understanding or the spatiotemporal synthesis of the imagination, “stands under the categories . . . the categories are conditions of the possibility of experience, and are thus also valid a priori of all objects of experience.”⁹³ If we follow Kant and are convinced by the two steps in his argument, the Transcendental Deduction succeeds in justifying the objective validity of the categories or pure concepts of the understanding; it succeeds in showing that anything that may ever come before our senses must already be formed by the a priori laws of the understanding. In doing so the Deduction secures the possibility of natural science against Humean skepticism, for it rejects the Humean view that we can describe matters of fact without already employing a priori laws. On Kant’s view, we cannot have representations with intentional content if we have not already placed ourselves under certain norms of thought. As I mentioned earlier, Kant’s argumentative strategy consists in *dissolving* the Humean problem by rejecting the Humean view that normative judgments are, as it were, tagged onto descriptions of fact.⁹⁴

4. Maimon’s Critique of Kant’s Argument

In my closing remarks to section 2, I said that Maimon’s dissatisfaction with Kant’s answer to the question *quid juris*, concerning our entitlement to apply the categories or forms of lawfulness and intelligibility to sensuously given objects, hinges on an internal rejection of Kant’s conception of space and time as pure

⁹¹ KrV, A69/B94.

⁹² KrV, B143.

⁹³ KrV, B161. The position I am describing corresponds to what Lucy Allais has recently described as a “moderate conceptualism.” Allais criticizes this reading by arguing that “we should not read ‘synthesis’ (and in particular, the syntheses with which the Deduction is concerned) as a general term covering any possible organization of the sensory input by the mind.” See Allais (2015), 173. Yet I don’t see how to reconcile Allais’s otherwise nuanced reading of the Deduction with Kant’s claim that figurative synthesis (*synthesis speciosa*) “belongs to sensibility” but “is still an exercise of spontaneity” (KrV, B152).

⁹⁴ As Engstler points out, Maimon does seem to understand this aspect of Kant’s argument in the Deduction; Maimon does not believe that the categories apply directly to matter, but only to the schemata. See Engstler (1990), 87–96.

intuitions. Having clarified the crucial role that pure intuitions play in Kant's argument in the Transcendental Deduction—it is only because space and time are themselves the product of the synthesis of the imagination that everything that can come before our senses, not just what is unified under the concept of an object, must stand under the categories; it is only because space and time are products of the synthesis of the imagination that we cannot be in the position that Hume envisions: capable of perceiving and making matter-of-factual claims and judgments without making normative ones—I can now clarify the reasons for Maimon's rejection of Kant's conception of space and time as pure intuitions.

There are two principal reasons for Maimon's rejection. First, Maimon is critical of the arguments that Kant provides for the apriority and intuitive character of space and time. Second, Kant's conception of the transcendental ideality of space and time goes against Maimon's commitment to infinite intelligibility. Let me explain these two objections.

In key passages of the Transcendental Aesthetic, Kant suggests that we can arrive at empty space and empty time through something like a process of abstraction from empirical objects. Kant states, for instance:

One can never represent that there is no space, though one can very well think that there are no objects to be encountered in it. It is therefore to be regarded as the condition of the possibility of appearances, not as a determination dependent on them, and is an *a priori* representation that necessarily grounds outer appearances.⁹⁵

This passage suggests that space can be thought in itself, without the objects *in* space.⁹⁶ In other key passages Kant suggests that we can arrive at empty space and empty time through something like a thought experiment:

So if I separate from the representation of a body that which the understanding thinks about it, such as substance, force, divisibility, etc., as well as that which belongs to sensation, such as impenetrability, hardness, color, etc., something from this empirical intuition is still left for me, namely extension and form. These belong to the pure intuition, which occurs *a priori*, even without an actual object of the senses or sensations, as a mere form of sensibility in the mind.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ KrV, A23/B39.

⁹⁶ This does not mean that Kant is upholding the Newtonian absolutist view of space, which ascribes metaphysical reality to space as the objective container in which all objects are placed. For Kant, space is the form of *human* sensibility, the *a priori* framework for appearances.

⁹⁷ KrV, A21/B35.

The aim of passages such as these is to demonstrate the apriority of space and time, and to show that space and time are not general *concepts* of the relations of things in general, but pure intuitions, singular and immediate representations.⁹⁸

Maimon rejects Kant's arguments for the apriority and intuitive character of space and time by attempting to show that space and time, *as* intuitions, are only fictions created by the imagination and are at root conceptually grounded.⁹⁹ Yet, when Maimon says that space and time are fictions created by the imagination, he does not seem to mean by this what Kant means when he says that space and time are products of a figurative synthesis of the imagination. Maimon phrases his claim as follows: "As intuition, space (and it is the same for time) is therefore an *ens imaginarium*: it arises because the imagination imagines as absolute what exists only in relation to something else: absolute place, absolute movement, and the like are of this kind."¹⁰⁰ In his monograph on Maimon's philosophy, Samuel Bergman helps us understand what Maimon means by calling space and time *fictions* of the imagination. While we can conceive space and time in abstraction from *particular* objects, we cannot conceive space and time in abstraction from *any* contents at all: "Empty space and empty time are based on an illusion of the imagination which takes a thing that is not dependent on any condition and believes that time and space, not being dependent on any definite content, can be made independent of all content whatever."¹⁰¹ Again, Maimon seems to be espousing the thought experiment reading of Kant's arguments for the apriority of space and time. Yet we can challenge Maimon's reading by drawing attention to other passages in the first *Critique* where Kant's arguments are interwoven

⁹⁸ See KrV, A320/B377: "The latter is either an intuition or a concept (*intuitus vel conceptus*). The former is immediately related to the object and is singular; the latter is mediate, by means of a mark, which can be common to several things." For a helpful discussion of Kant's arguments for the apriority and intuitive nature of space and time and Maimon's critique of Kant's arguments, see Thielke (2003), 90–96.

⁹⁹ Below I discuss at greater length the idea that space and time are at root conceptually grounded.

¹⁰⁰ Tr, 2:18–19; ETP, 13.

¹⁰¹ Bergman (1967), 51. See also Atlas (1964), 168: "It is an illusion to consider space a separate entity, abstracted from the variety of objects with which it is necessarily associated, or as a pure transcendental form of intuition of external objects." See also 172: "Hence, the concept of infinite, empty space is not a real concept, but a fiction of the imagination." And see 173: "Empty space is not the immediate intuition of the form of sensibility, as Kant maintains; it is an imaginary idea derived by a process of abstraction. The concept of space as such is the form of the diversity of objects; it is directly conceived together with the diverse objects. By a process of abstraction, however, it is possible to imagine that if there were no objects in the world, space would nevertheless remain. This result rests on a peculiar illusion of our imaginative faculty. It follows from taking something that is not dependent on a particular condition for something not dependent on any condition whatsoever."

with his account of how geometry works.¹⁰² For instance, in the Ideal of Pure Reason Kant makes the following claim: “All manifoldness of things is only so many different ways of limiting the concept of the highest reality, *just as all figures are possible only as different ways of limiting infinite space*.”¹⁰³ This passage suggests that, just as in geometry, we can construct figures by limiting space in various different ways, we can conceive of individual empirical objects by regarding them as limitations of the concept of the highest reality.¹⁰⁴ Significantly, by referring in the same breath to infinite space and to the concept of the highest reality, this passage also directly connects the Transcendental Ideal and the Transcendental Aesthetic.¹⁰⁵ As we will see below, this different reading of Kant’s argument for the apriority of space and time reduces the distance between Kant’s and Maimon’s accounts of empirical cognition.

Even if we disagree with Maimon’s interpretation of Kant’s arguments for the apriority of space and time in the Transcendental Aesthetic, we must still consider whether the second reason for his rejection of Kant’s conception of space and time as pure intuitions makes the question whether Maimon does or does not misread Kant beside the point. I mentioned above that Kant’s conception of the transcendental ideality of space and time goes against Maimon’s commitment to infinite intelligibility. On Kant’s view, space and time are the *contingent* forms of our human sensibility.¹⁰⁶ As Kant remarks in the Deduction:

But for the peculiarity of our understanding, that it is able to bring about the unity of apperception a priori only by means of the categories and only through precisely this kind and number of them, a further ground may be offered just as little as one can be offered for why we

¹⁰² Because Thielke primarily focuses on the arguments from abstraction, he is more willing than I am to grant Maimon’s objections to Kant’s arguments for the apriority and intuitive nature of space and time. See Thielke (2003), 93–96.

¹⁰³ KrV, A578/B606.

¹⁰⁴ See Förster (2012), 149: “The point of discussing the Academy’s prize competition on optimism has been to illuminate the physico-theological background against which the distinction between an intuitive understanding and intellectual intuition reveals its contours. The former concept primarily refers to the way in which the divine understanding, which contains the sum of all possibilities, intuitively itself. . . . Since there is nothing outside of God and God is essentially one, determinations must be conceived as limitations of God’s essence (in a way analogous to geometry where figures arise as limitations of space).”

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion of how this reading of Kant’s argument detects a Spinozistic spirit in Kant’s views on space and time, see Franks (2005a), 91–93.

¹⁰⁶ As I mentioned in the introduction, this is one of the reasons why Karl Ameriks describes Kant’s philosophy as one of “modest systematicity”; as he rightly notes, Kant is “perfectly willing to allow that various basic aspects of experience remain inexplicable primitives; we just *do* work with space, time and forms of judgment” (Ameriks [2000], 63).

have precisely these and no other functions for judgment or for why space and time are the sole forms of our possible intuition.¹⁰⁷

If Kant finds no need to explain why we have the forms of sensibility that we do have, this is because he is committed to “*both finite and infinite intelligibility*.”¹⁰⁸ Space and time are sufficiently intelligible as the forms of outer and inner appearances, yet there is no evident reason why all appearances must be given to us by means of these two forms. By contrast, Maimon “wants to hold that *all* aspects of experience are in principle intelligible,” that everything has or exists for a reason.¹⁰⁹ It is because of this commitment to infinite intelligibility that Maimon rejects Kant’s conception of space and time as pure forms of sensibility and instead attempts to lead the specific features of space and time to an absolute or self-evident epistemological principle, which, as we will see below, is only intelligible within a broader metaphysical framework.

Maimon believes that it is only by returning to the Leibnizian view that space and time are concepts of the relations of things that we can *explain* why everything that is given to us must be given by means of these forms.¹¹⁰ If, on Kant’s view, space and time are the conditions of human sensibility, on Maimon’s view, space and time are the conditions of *all* real *thought*.¹¹¹ As Maimon phrases this idea in the *Essay*, the particular forms of our human sensibility

¹⁰⁷ KrV, B145–146.

¹⁰⁸ Franks (2003), 203.

¹⁰⁹ See Beiser (1987), 300.

¹¹⁰ On Leibniz’s view, the specific features of time can be correlated with descriptions of the states of monadic substances. For instance, the temporal relation of *succession* can be correlated with the relation between the appetitive states of the monad. In *Heidegger’s Temporal Idealism*, William Blattner clarifies how Leibniz grounds the appearance of time. See Blattner (2005), 262: “In what way could one ground the appearance of time? Leibniz’s strategy is to posit an extratemporal structure that is correlative and isomorphic with time.” On Thielke’s view, Maimon’s conception of space and time as conditions for being able to perceive identity in difference represents an alternative to the Leibnizian conception of space and time as concepts abstracted from the relations of objects. Yet it remains unclear to me whether Maimon’s view genuinely amounts to an alternative to the Leibnizian view. See Thielke (2003), 90–93. Yitzhak Melamed has argued that Maimon was more deeply indebted to Spinoza than he was to Leibniz, and that Maimon’s characterization of his philosophy as a form of Leibnizianism was merely a strategy to avoid the association with Spinoza in the midst of the pantheism controversy. See Melamed (2004). I will discuss below Maimon’s relation to Spinoza, yet one of the most interesting aspects of Maimon’s philosophy is its unusual integration of different philosophical perspectives, whether these be Leibnizian, Spinozistic, or Kabbalistic.

¹¹¹ See Bergman (1967), 40: “In other words, time and space are for Maimon the conditions of thought *überhaupt*. Kant had *reduced* time and space to the human forms of intuition and indicated that there might be creatures who could dispense with these forms. Maimon, however, in keeping with his rationalist convictions, raises time and space to a higher level and takes them as the conditions of the thinking of empirical entities, the objective ground of empirical knowledge.”

have their ground in the universal forms of our thought in general, because the condition of our thought (consciousness) in general is unity in the manifold. . . . So space and time are these special forms by means of which unity in the manifold of sensible objects is possible, and hence by means of which these objects themselves are possible as objects of our consciousness.¹¹²

This passage shows that, on Maimon's view, space and time are the conditions for all real thought, but it does not clarify *why* space and time are conditions for thought or consciousness: conditions for being able to perceive unity in the manifold. Being able to perceive unity in a manifold involves being able to perceive things as both identical and different. Maimon explains why space and time are together the conditions for being able to perceive identity in difference by pointing out that if I wish to view two things as different from each other, I must view them "simultaneously, that is, in one and the same point in time."¹¹³ Stated otherwise, if I wish to view two things as different or outside of each other, I must, as it were, cancel their trajectory in time and focus only on their position in space. Yet if I wish to compare a variety of different things, I must do so by taking up aspects of these things in "a temporal succession, one after the other."¹¹⁴ Stated otherwise, if I wish to compare a variety of different things, I must, as it were, cancel their separate positions in space and focus successively on the aspects and relations that I am comparing. Space and time are therefore, together, the conditions for differentiation and individuation, and as *concepts* or *rules* they specify what we must *do* in order to be able to think of anything at all.¹¹⁵

Given that, for Kant, space and time as pure intuitions serve as the intermediaries between the pure concepts of the understanding and the manifold that is given in sensibility, we can see why Maimon's rejection of Kant's views on the nature of space and time amounts to the claim that Kant hasn't found an adequate answer to the question *quid juris?* On Maimon's view, Kant hasn't been able to explain why the scenario that he envisages in the opening pages of the *Transcendental Analytic* isn't the case:

¹¹² Tr, 2:16; ETP, 13.

¹¹³ Tr, 2:17; ETP, 13.

¹¹⁴ Tr, 2:17; ETP, 13.

¹¹⁵ See Bergman (1967), 43: "We must assume, then, that differentiation has two aspects—heterogeneity in space and diversity in time. Two objects can be related to each other sometimes discreetly in space and sometimes successively in time." See also Atlas (1964), 170: "Time and space may be considered the conditions indispensable for the perception of the variety of objects." Again, it is important to keep in mind that, for Kant, the categories or pure concepts of the understanding are rules for the formation of judgments.

For appearances could after all be so constituted that the understanding would not find them in accord with the conditions of its unity, and everything would then lie in such confusion that, e.g., in the succession of appearances nothing would offer itself that would furnish a rule of synthesis and thus correspond to the concept of cause and effect, so that this concept would therefore be entirely empty, nugatory, and without significance.¹¹⁶

As I have argued above, though, there is a way of reading Kant that challenges the more traditional, dualistic, account of the relationship between sensibility and understanding.¹¹⁷ Yet because of Maimon's commitment to infinite intelligibility, which I have been calling his "rational dogmatism," he might reject Kant's view, even on this charitable rereading of it. Given Maimon's competing conception of space and time as the conditions of thought *überhaupt*, we can begin to see that Maimon will offer his own answer to the question *quid juris* by claiming that sensibility and understanding "both flow from one and the same cognitive source."¹¹⁸ If sensibility and understanding flow from the same cognitive source, then there is no longer a need to build a bridge between them and there is no longer a question about our right to apply forms of intelligibility to unformed matter when we are making empirical judgments about the natural world, although, as we will see, there will be a different question about how we achieve a real synthesis of concepts. In the following section, I give credence to Maimon's answer to the question *quid juris* by showing how he derives the forms of sensibility and categories of the understanding from a single principle or law governing all real thought: the principle of determinability.¹¹⁹ As I mentioned in

¹¹⁶ KrV, A91/B123.

¹¹⁷ Fred Beiser's understanding of Maimon's skepticism is one example of the more traditional reading. See Beiser (2003), 239: "Thus the ultimate challenge of Maimon's skepticism—for Fichte, and indeed the whole post-Kantian generation—was how to bridge the gap between understanding and sensibility, noumena and phenomena. If it were not possible to surmount Kant's dualisms, to find some synthesis or middle term between them, then the skeptical problem remained unsolved, so that the whole realm of experience could be an illusion." As I argue above, Kant's conception of space and time as products of the figurative synthesis of the imagination enables us to find this "middle term" between sensibility and understanding. The more common, dualistic, reading of the Deduction corresponds to what Conant has called the "layer cake" conception of human mindedness. See Conant (2016), 77: "To understand human cognitive functioning in this way is to picture it as a layer cake: the bottom level of the cake is the layer of our merely animal capacities for interacting with the world. The layer that sits on top of that is the upper layer of human cognitive functioning: the layer of our (more or less) distinctively human (so-called rational) capacities. What is crucial to the assumption is the following idea: that the internal character of the manifold constituting the bottom layer remains unaffected by the introduction of the upper layer."

¹¹⁸ Tr, 2:63; ETP, 38.

¹¹⁹ Maimon describes this method in the *Logik*, for example. See *Logik*, V, 214.

the introduction to this chapter, the conception of philosophy that characterizes Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and is also the source of inspiration for the different projects of the post-Kantian German Idealists—if philosophy is to obtain the form of a science capable of meeting reason's demand for unconditioned explanation, it must take the form of a systematic derivation of all a priori knowledge from a single first law or principle—has its source in Maimon's rejection of Kant's answer to the question *quid juris* and in Maimon's alternative answer to that question through the derivation of all a priori knowledge from the principle of determinability. This is Maimon's methodological innovation.

5. The Principle of Determinability

In the Transcendental Logic, Kant draws a distinction between general logic, which considers only the rules of thinking without taking into consideration the content of thought, and transcendental logic, which considers the laws of the understanding and reason *in relation* to objects a priori.¹²⁰ On Kant's view, the principle of noncontradiction is the highest principle and criterion of general logic; the transcendental unity of apperception is the highest principle and criterion of transcendental logic.¹²¹ Maimon adopts Kant's distinction between general and transcendental logic, and he agrees that the law of contradiction is the highest principle of general logic. Yet he does not believe that agreement with the conditions under which representations can “stand together in a universal self-consciousness”—the transcendental unity of apperception—can provide *necessary* and *sufficient* criteria for thought in relation to real objects.¹²² On Maimon's view, the principle of determinability is the highest principle of all real thought. It is important to keep in mind that by “real thought” Maimon means all synthetic judgments, including synthetic judgments in mathematics and physics

¹²⁰ KrV, A56/B80–A57/B82.

¹²¹ KrV, B132. See Bergman (1967), 96: “The highest principle of formal logic is . . . the law of contradiction. What, then, is the highest principle of transcendental logic? In Leibniz's system it is the law of sufficient reason, in Kant's system the transcendental unity of apperception, and in Maimon's system the ‘principle of determinability.’” Samuel Atlas claims that, on Maimon's view, Kant *fails* to provide a criterion of cognition, i.e., thought in relation to real objects. Yet it is more accurate to say that, on Maimon's view, the transcendental unity of apperception provides a *necessary* but not *sufficient* criterion for cognition. See Atlas (1964), 157. Below I argue that, on Kant's view, the transcendental unity of apperception is itself understood only in relation to the kind of unity that is named by the transcendental ideal.

¹²² KrV, B133. Like Longuenesse, I believe that we can only understand Kant's criterion for real thought—the transcendental unity of apperception—if we understand the manner in which the synthetic activity of the understanding is affected by reason's demand for a unified body of knowledge.

and including the synthetic judgments that fall within the domain of special metaphysics. Thus, what distinguishes real thought from purely formal thought is both the intentional relationship to an object or content of thought and the ampliative character of the judgment. Yet, on Maimon's view, the principle of determinability is also the highest principle governing all analytic judgments.

In addition to adopting Kant's distinction between general and transcendental logic, Maimon holds that transcendental logic must be *prior* to general logic and that general logic must be based on transcendental logic.¹²³ On Maimon's view, this is because before we can determine through an analysis of concepts whether the predicate of a judgment contradicts the concept that is in the position of the subject of a judgment, we must first determine whether the predicate is a possible predicate of the subject, and, on Maimon's view, we can only do this in accordance with the principle of determinability, which is the highest principle of transcendental logic. That the principle of determinability is the highest principle governing both synthetic and analytic judgments is made clear by Maimon's statement in the *Essay* that this principle or law is "nothing other than the objective possibility of a synthesis in general."¹²⁴

Before I can explain Maimon's methodological innovation and show how he attempts to derive all a priori knowledge from the principle of determinability, I must first explain how he understands the relationship between the concepts in the position of the subject and predicate of a judgment formed in accordance with this highest principle. Maimon defines this relationship in his opening remark to chapter 4 of the *Essay*:

If one of the constituent parts of a synthesis can be thought without reference to the other, i.e. either in itself or in another synthesis, but the other cannot be thought without reference to the first, then the first is termed the subject of the synthesis and the latter the predicate.¹²⁵

In other words, in accordance with the principle of determinability, two concepts that are synthesized form a real unity and name a real object only when the component concepts stand in a definite and asymmetric relationship to each other: while one of the concepts, the subject, can be thought in itself,

¹²³ See Maimon's discussion of the relationship between general and transcendental logic in the *Logik*, V, 464–66. On Kant's view, transcendental logic encompasses the logic of both the general and particular uses of the understanding. See KrV A52/B76–A53/B77. The difference between Kant and Maimon in this respect is that Kant does not believe that we need to revise general logic even if there is a priority of transcendental logic; as we will see below, Maimon does believe that we must revise general logic once we have understood the priority of transcendental logic. This issue comes to a head in Hegel's *Science of Logic*.

¹²⁴ Tr, 2:85; ETP, 49.

¹²⁵ Tr, 2:84; ETP, 49.

the second concept, the predicate, cannot be thought of by itself, but only in relation to the subject.¹²⁶ Maimon also characterizes the relationship between two concepts that are joined by a real synthesis by saying that the predicate of the judgment *determines* the subject, and the subject of the judgment is *determinable* by the predicate.¹²⁷ Let's consider a few examples. As Jan Bransen mentions in *The Antinomy of Thought*, Maimon would consider the relationship between the concepts "green" and "color" in the judgment: "the color is green" to be one of real determination, but not the relationship between the concepts "green" and "grass" in the judgment: "the grass is green."¹²⁸ This is because, while we can think of "green" without thinking of "grass"—for instance, we can think of a green avocado—we cannot think of "green" without thinking of it as a color. Similarly, if we consider the relationship between the concepts in the judgment: "the triangle is right-angled," we notice that we can think of a triangle without thinking of it as right-angled—for instance, think of an equilateral triangle, or think of space enclosed by three lines of equal size—but we cannot think of a right angle without thinking of the two lines that are sides of the triangle that we are considering. This shows that the object that results from the synthesis of the two concepts "triangle" and "right-angled" constitutes a real object, "since the elements of synthesis follow the law governing the relation of the concepts constituting the synthesis."¹²⁹ By contrast, if we consider the judgment: "virtue is not square," we can immediately see that there is no relation of determinability between the two component concepts of the judgment; these two concepts are incompatible.¹³⁰

When two concepts can be synthesized in accordance with the principle of determinability, this creates a new concept that can then take the position of the subject in a new judgment and can be determined by a second predicate in accordance with the principle of determinability. This second stage of

¹²⁶ Logik, V, 78–94.

¹²⁷ Tr, 2:94; ETP, 54.

¹²⁸ Bransen (1991), 110.

¹²⁹ Atlas (1964), 159.

¹³⁰ Bergman (1967), 125. Our "seeing" that there is no relation of determinability between the two concepts that form the judgment is grounded in or explained by the incompatibility of these two concepts. On Maimon's view, an infinite judgment is one whose function is to establish that two concepts stand in no relation of determinability and so cannot be synthesized into real objects of thought. See Atlas (1964), 160–161. To better understand how Maimon is using the notion of determinability, it helps to keep in mind that Maimon is drawing on Leibniz's views on the nature of individuation. In the *Discourse on Metaphysics* (1686), Leibniz holds that each individual substance has "a notion so complete that it is sufficient to contain and to allow us to deduce from it all the predicates of the subject to which this notion is attributed." Had we God's perspective, we would be able to see how the predicates of each individual substance follow by necessity from its individual notion, or haecceity. See Leibniz (1991), 8.

determination creates a new synthesis, and so on. For instance, if we consider the compound concept “a right-angled triangle,” with a little thought we can see that the concept is already enabled by a previous synthesis expressed in the judgment: “a triangle is space enclosed by three lines,” for we can think of “space” without thinking of the three lines that form a triangle, but we cannot think of the three lines that form a triangle without thinking of the space that is enclosed by them. Maimon conveys the *cumulative* nature of the process of conceptual determination when he says that a determination is “something that, when added to the determinable, provides a ground for new consequences (that the determinable did not have before).”¹³¹ Or as Bergman phrases the idea: “This kind of synthesis creates a new concept from which conclusions are derived that could not have been derived from either one of the members of the synthesis alone.”¹³² What this shows is that a real synthesis of concepts is *ampliative*, since the predicate of the judgment amplifies the concept that is in the position of the subject of the judgment. It is in this sense that the principle of determinability is the law that governs all *synthetic judgments*, since it enables us to see how a concept is generated from a previous concept or chain of concepts.

Yet the ampliative nature of a real synthesis cannot be the end of the story, for Maimon also holds that the principle of determinability implies two consequences that amount to the idea that *in principle* all synthetic judgments can be turned into analytic judgments. First, the principle of determinability implies that every predicate determines only one subject—for instance, on Maimon’s view, “figure” does not determine the concept “body,” but the concept “form,” and “red” does not determine the concept “body,” but the concept “color.”¹³³ Second, the principle of determinability implies that each subject can at one time be determined by one and only one predicate—for instance, Maimon believes that in order to think of a complex concept such as “a red, round tomato” as a real object of thought, we must think of the individual syntheses that make up this concept in a successive linear chain of determinations, for example, we must think first of “red” as a concept that determines “color,” and before we think of “round,” we must think of “shape” as a concept that determines “space.” Jan Bransen summarizes what these two consequences of the principle mean for Maimon’s conception of the nature of real thought:

The only possibility for us to think of complex objects now seems to be that we have to assume that representations are ordered in a hierarchical, linear way. . . . All this suggests that Maimon is thinking of

¹³¹ Tr, 2:391; ETP, 202.

¹³² Bergman (1967), 97.

¹³³ See Tr, 2:90–92; ETP, 52–53. See also Bergman (1967), 99, and Bransen (1991), 111.

linear chains of representations, of which every link is governed by the *Principle of Determinability*, such that *the thought of the chain as a whole* would amount to a complete concept of a real object.¹³⁴

The image of thought that Maimon envisages is one that moves in one direction and in time, from generality to greater and greater particularity. We start off with a few general concepts and progressively determine them by judgments governed by the principle of determinability. Ideally, if we could conceive an infinite linear chain of determinations, we would arrive at the complete determination of each concept. In that case, our judgments would be “analytic-synthetic.” Our judgments would be analytic from the point of view of the predicate, for we could retrospectively see how the infinite chain of determinations was already covertly contained in the concept that is in the position of the subject of the judgment, but they would be synthetic from the point of view of the subject, for each predicate determines and amplifies the concept that is in the position of the subject of the judgment.¹³⁵

If our thought were not an activity of gradual determination occurring in time and moving in a progressive direction, we would be able to traverse the infinite series of determinations for each concept in an instant and have a priori knowledge of synthetic truths, for these would have been turned into “analytic-synthetic” truths. As Samuel Atlas explains:

The human mind can produce an infinite series only through an infinite succession in time, as our perception is bound up with time. The finite and limited human mind is thus incapable of completing an infinite series. The infinite mind, however, which is not restricted by sensibility and not conditioned by time, conceives the thought of an infinite series simultaneously and instantaneously; it does not require for its completion a succession in time.¹³⁶

In the following section, I clarify why Maimon considers the metaphysical assumption of an infinite intellect of which our finite intellect is a *schema* or limited version to be necessary if we are to find an adequate answer to Hume’s question concerning our entitlement to make empirical judgments that make claims to universality and necessity, and so to be necessary if we are to find an adequate answer to Kant’s version of Hume’s question. For the moment I draw

¹³⁴ My emphasis. Bransen (1991), 112.

¹³⁵ See Maimon’s discussion of the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments in the *Logik*, V, 84.

¹³⁶ Atlas (1964), 130. See also Tr, 2:62; ETP, 37: “So I can only think that Kant assumed the reality of synthetic propositions merely with respect to our limited understanding; and in this I am readily in agreement with him.”

attention to the manner in which the passage by Atlas shows how the forms of sensibility, space and time, are bound up with the principle of determinability, the principle governing all thought. On Maimon's view, we can only grasp the determinate content of a concept by producing a series of determinations, each succeeding the previous determination *in time*. Yet if we want to view this series as the series that determines the concept of a single object, we have to disregard the temporal succession and consider the different determinations simultaneously, as embodied by the single object *in space* that we are presently considering—we do this, for instance, when we consider “a red, round tomato.” This shows that space and time are conditions for thinking of things *as* chains of concepts determined in accordance with the principle of determinability. It is in this manner that Maimon explains why everything that is given to us must be given by means of space and time: space and time are derived from and have their source in the highest law that governs all real thought.¹³⁷

Maimon employs a similar method to justify the objective validity of the categories or pure concepts of the understanding. Because my aim here is not to show how Maimon derives each of the categories from the principle of determinability, but only to clarify his methodological innovation, it is sufficient to show how Maimon derives from the principle of determinability the categories of inherence and subsistence—substance and accident—which in Kant's table of the categories correspond to the categorical judgment.¹³⁸ As mentioned in this chapter's introduction, Maimon's methodological innovation is the source of the German Idealist view that all a priori knowledge must be systematically derived from a single first principle.

We have seen that the principle of determinability is the most general law for the permitted combination of concepts. As Bergman explains, in order to derive the categories from this general principle, we first “assume the possibility of thinking a real object and attempt to discover the conditions of this possibility. These conditions are the categories.”¹³⁹ For instance, according to the principle of determinability, there is a one-sided dependence of the predicate on the subject: while the subject can be thought of in itself, the predicate can only be thought in relation to the subject.¹⁴⁰ Considering Descartes's

¹³⁷ Below I also show that, on Maimon's view, the unity of space and time is the empirical analogue of an ideal, fully determined logical space.

¹³⁸ KrV, A80/B106. KrV, A70/B95.

¹³⁹ Bergman (1967), 119. See Maimon's formulation of this idea in the *Logik*, V, 215–216. See also Schechter (2003), 36.

¹⁴⁰ See Descartes (1983). In part I, article 53, Descartes states that each substance has one principal attribute constituting its nature and that all the properties of the substance can be understood and perceived distinctly as modes of that principal attribute. Leibniz refers to Descartes's definition of a substance in order to argue that there is a perfect fit between nature and our epistemic capacities.

definition of a substance as a thing that exists in such a manner that it requires nothing else for its existence, and considering Maimon's view that a thing is nothing more than the chain of concepts that compose it, the subject of a judgment can be considered the *substance* and the predicate of a judgment the *accident*: "the concepts of substance and accident are just the logical concepts of subject and predicate understood in their transcendental signification."¹⁴¹ In this manner, the two categories that correspond in Kant's table of categories to the categorical form of judgment are derived as conditions of possibility for thinking of an object in accordance with the single general principle of determinability.

Moreover, on Maimon's view, the categorical judgment "a is b" simply *expresses* the one-sided dependence of the predicate on the subject. Unlike Kant, who derives the table of categories from the forms of judgment, Maimon holds that we can arrive at the forms of judgment by a process of subtraction that "eliminates the element of reality" from the relation between the subject and predicate.¹⁴² Thus, the categorical judgment expresses the real relation of determinability in a purely formal manner.

Yet this reversal of Kant's deductive strategy also leads to a significant revision of Kant's views on the kind of synthesis achieved by each of the forms of judgment. For example, Maimon holds that the hypothetical judgment does not express a *different* relation from that expressed by the categorical judgment.¹⁴³ We can consider the two categories that correspond to the hypothetical judgment, cause and effect, to express the same relationship that is expressed by the categories that correspond to the categorical judgment, substance and accident, since both express the relationship of determinability. As Maimon phrases this idea:

If it is true that the concept of cause contains not just a subjective but an objective necessity (although this remains to be proved), then there is a real necessity in addition to this logical necessity, a necessity that concerns the relation of things to one another in existence rather than the existence of things in general. 'If A comes first, then B must necessarily follow it' is tantamount to saying that if both A and B exist, then

See Leibniz (1991), 304: "Thus in the order of nature (setting miracles aside) God does not arbitrarily give these or those qualities indifferently to substances; he never gives them any but those which are natural to them, that is to say, those that can be derived from their nature as explicable modifications."

¹⁴¹ Tr, 2:185; ETP, 99.

¹⁴² Bergman (1967), 123.

¹⁴³ See Maimon's discussion of this idea in the Logik, V, 223.

this existence must be of the following kind: *A* always comes first and *B* follows.¹⁴⁴

Yet when Maimon says, “If *A* comes first, then *B* must necessarily follow it,” he means that *B* is *logically* dependent on *A*, not that *B* is *causally* dependent on *A*, in the sense that if event *A* happens, then event *B* must necessarily happen. Thus, on Maimon’s view the *causal* relation can in principle be translated into or reduced to a *logical* relation.¹⁴⁵

This means that, on Maimon’s view, the hypothetical judgment, which expresses the relationship between subject and predicate in the form of a conditional proposition, is doubtful only because it is a peculiar way of phrasing categorical judgments that we adopt when making empirical judgments about natural facts and events.¹⁴⁶ Yet there is a good reason for adopting this form of judgment when making empirical judgments. As seen, our condition as finite beings means that we cannot instantaneously traverse each link in the infinite chain of logical entailment that goes into forming the determinate concept of any spatiotemporal object. The hypothetical judgment is therefore the empirical analogue or incomplete version of a fully determined categorical judgment, and the relationship between two events in space and time must be understood as isomorphic with an extratemporal difference in conceptual structure, for, on Maimon’s view, each object is fully determined according to its ideal or complete concept, and this includes each object’s relationship to all other objects.¹⁴⁷ As Maimon phrases this idea: “Being outside one another in time and space has its ground in the difference between things, i.e. the imagination, which is the ape of the understanding, represents the things *a* and *b* as external to one another in time and space because the understanding thinks them as different.”¹⁴⁸ This statement shows that, on Maimon’s view, relations between events in space and time are like empirical versions of the

¹⁴⁴ Tr, 2:254; ETP, 133–134. Because Maimon will reformulate many of the arguments he employs to solve the problems he sees in Kant’s theoretical works in order to solve the problems he sees in Kant’s ethical works, it is worthwhile to note that in this passage Maimon is nearly citing the passage in the *Critique of Practical Reason* where Kant discusses the nature of the threat that Humean skepticism poses for our understanding of normativity. KpV, 5:51.

¹⁴⁵ See Bergman (1967), 118. See also Maimon’s discussion of this idea in the *Wörterbuch*. PhW, III, 43. See also Engstler (1990), 80.

¹⁴⁶ Tr, 2:183–184; ETP, 99.

¹⁴⁷ Tr, 2:184; ETP, 99.

¹⁴⁸ Tr, 2:133–134; ETP, 75. In the *Philosophisches Wörterbuch* Maimon also describes space and time as images or pictures of difference. See PhW, III, 41–42. See also Bergman (1967), 48: “As concepts [space and time] were only the relations of the diversity of objects, and only objects that differ with respect to the concept could be discrete in space and time.”

relations between the concepts of things in a logical space, and it suggests that our assumption that every object has a unique place in space and a trajectory in time is like an empirical version of the idea that every possible thing has its unique position in a logical space. Moreover, Maimon's statement implies that in the case of appearances or empirical objects, space and time as concepts of the relations between things play the role that in the case of the concepts of things would be played by the idea of a fully determined logical space.¹⁴⁹ The idea of a fully determined logical space is, as it were, the "ideal ground" of the unity of space and time, for it is only through the assumption of that idea that we can understand our attempt to determine the real difference between objects in space and time, but the unity of space and time is, as it were, the "real ground" of the idea of a fully determined logical space, for only our need to determine the real difference between objects in space *generates* the idea of a fully determined logical space.¹⁵⁰ Evidently intending to echo Kant's conception of the relationship between freedom and the moral law in the second *Critique*, Maimon says that we can have no "cognition of the original [the ideal of a fully determined logical space] other than by means of the copy [the unity of space and time]."¹⁵¹

Maimon's view that the relations between events in space and time are like empirical versions of the relations between the concepts of things in a logical space also helps clarify what he means by calling space and time fictions of the imagination. As limited cognizers, we represent conceptual differences as spatial

¹⁴⁹ It is important to keep in mind here that, for Kant, a concept is a rule or law, so space and time as *concepts* specify rules for determining empirical objects, just as the idea of a fully determined logical space specifies a rule for determining the concepts of empirical objects.

¹⁵⁰ Yet, in the *Logik*, Maimon also says that space and time serve as "negative criteria" for the completion of our knowledge. What he seems to mean by this is that spatiotemporal differences can help us understand what are, in fact, conceptual differences, but this is only because we can never arrive at complete conceptual determination. See *Logik*, V, 196–198. See also Thielke (2003), 101–102: "Space and time, Maimon goes on to claim, serve as 'negative criteria' of this incompleteness" (*Logik*, V, 192). Although we never have complete determination, we do get *nearer* to the complete concept of an object. That we represent objects in space and time points to the fact that something *remains to be determined*—spatial or temporal diversities, that is, must have their ground in some conceptual differences."

¹⁵¹ See KpV, 5:5: "Lest anyone suppose that he finds an *inconsistency* when I now call freedom the condition of the moral law and afterwards, in the treatise, maintain that the moral law is the condition under which we can first *become aware* of freedom, I want only to remark that whereas freedom is the *ratio essendi* of the moral law, the moral law is the *ratio cognoscendi* of freedom. For, had not the moral law *already* been distinctly thought in our reason, we should never consider ourselves justified in *assuming* such a thing as freedom (even though it is not self-contradictory). But were there no freedom, the moral law would *not be encountered* at all in ourselves." In chapter 3, I explain Kant's conception of the reciprocal relationship between freedom and the moral law. Tr, 2:135; ETP, 75.

or temporal differences. As Peter Thielke helpfully explains, this amounts to a process of fictionalizing:

We, as limited cognizers, attribute certain features or properties to objects which in themselves these objects do not possess. To take a contemporary example, when physicists speak of “string theory,” we need not take them to be discussing real objects. Instead, “cosmic strings” provide a useful heuristic for understanding macro-level phenomena, even if the “strings” such a theory posits turn out to be mere fictions.¹⁵²

Just as positing “cosmic strings” can help us understand certain macro-level phenomena, spatiotemporal differences between objects can help us understand what are, in fact, only conceptual differences.

My principal aim in this section has been to explain what I take to be Maimon’s methodological innovation. By rejecting the view that space and time are pure intuitions, Maimon destroys the Kantian bridge between sensibility and understanding; in doing so he also undermines the Kantian argument for the objective validity of the categories in the Transcendental Deduction of the first *Critique*. Instead, Maimon attempts to justify the objective validity of the categories by showing we can derive them from the principle of determinability. Because the principle of determinability is the most general law for the permitted combination of concepts, and because, on Maimon’s view, a real object is nothing more than the chain of conceptual determinations that compose it, there is no longer a question about our entitlement to apply the categories to sensuously given objects, since now even matter has been fully conceptualized.¹⁵³ Yet now there are different questions. It is now necessary to show that the categories are the conditions of possibility for thinking of real objects. Maimon does this by explaining how the categories are involved in achieving a synthesis of concepts in accordance with the principle of determinability. It is now also necessary to clarify how we know whether we have brought two concepts into a real synthesis. As we will see in section 7, Maimon does this by upholding the view that there is an “identity-in-difference” between our human finite intellect and the divine infinite intellect.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Thielke (2003), 99.

¹⁵³ On Maimon’s view, the distinction between matter and form is not a real distinction, but only one of degree: matter is what has not been fully conceptualized or what lies below our conscious conceptual register. See Tr, 2:182–183; ETP, 98: “Kant claims that sensibility and understanding are two completely different faculties. But I argue that an infinite thinking being must think of them as one and the same power despite the fact that we must represent them as two different faculties in us, *and that for us sensibility is incomplete understanding*.” See also Tr, 2:208–210; ETP 111: “But I have already explained that I hold the representation or concept of the thing to be one and the same as the thing, and that they can only be distinguished through the completeness of the latter with respect to the former.”

¹⁵⁴ Franks (2002b), 64.

In explaining Maimon's methodological innovation I also drew attention to an aspect of Maimon's thought that, as I will argue in the next section, enables a rereading of the overall argumentative structure of Kant's first *Critique*. Maimon wishes to show that the synthetic activity of the understanding, conceived as our attempt to determine the concepts of objects, only makes sense within a broader teleological and metaphysical framework. We have seen that, on Maimon's view, each object is fully determined according to its ideal or complete concept and that our *need* to determine the real difference between spatiotemporal objects can be understood on the assumption of the idea of a uniquely partitioned and fully determined logical space. In the next section, I show how this teleological framework enables a rereading of the argumentative structure of the first *Critique* that reveals the relationship between sensibility, understanding, and reason. This rereading of the argumentative structure of the first *Critique* brings Kant closer to Maimon and to the post-Kantian German Idealists, and it shows that Kant has the resources to address Maimon's key challenges. Yet this rereading of the first *Critique* also forces us to radically alter our understanding of Kant's discursive account of human cognition.

Before offering this Maimonian rereading of the first *Critique*, I want to pause and briefly compare how Maimon and Robert Brandom interpret a key aspect of Kant's view on the synthetic activity of the understanding. Doing so will help make Maimon's ideas seem less foreign by showing that there is a family resemblance between his views on conceptual representation and contemporary readings of Kant that bring him closer to the post-Kantian German Idealists. Both Maimon and Brandom explain the intentional directedness of judgments, the fact that they represent or are about something, by upholding the view that matter must in some sense be conceptualized; and they both take this to be a broadly Kantian view, but one that obviously puts pressure on his discursive account of human cognition.

In his *Reason in Philosophy* and in various other works, Brandom argues that, on Kant's view, representational purport is to be understood *normatively* and *pragmatically*, in terms of the activity of synthesis. On Brandom's view, the activity of judging—bringing the manifold of given representations under the synthetic unity of apperception—should be understood as a kind of task responsibility, “the responsibility to integrate the judgment into a unity of apperception.”¹⁵⁵ This involves *critical*, *ampliative*, and *justificatory* responsibilities. One's critical responsibility is to “weed out materially incompatible commitments” by either rejecting judgments that are incompatible with what we are already committed to or abandoning the offending prior commitments. One's

¹⁵⁵ Brandom (2009), 35.

ampliative responsibility is “to extract the material inferential consequences of each commitment, including new ones.” Each judgment, each commitment, implicitly commits us to acknowledge those commitments that follow from it. One’s justificatory responsibility is “to be prepared to offer reasons for the commitments . . . that one acknowledges, by citing prior commitments (or undertaking further commitments) that inferentially entitle one to those new commitments.” On Brandom’s view, our ultimate aim in fulfilling these three tasks is to arrive at a whole constellation of commitments that is consistent, complete, and warranted.¹⁵⁶

I highlight Brandom’s view that the “key to Kant’s account of representation is to be found in [this] story about how representational purport is to be understood in terms of the activity of synthesizing an original unity of apperception.”¹⁵⁷ As I mentioned above, on Brandom’s reading of Kant, representational purport, the intentional directedness of judgments, is to be understood normatively and pragmatically, in terms of the activity of synthesis; representational content is to be understood in the same way. As he says:

The relations of material incompatibility and inferential consequence among judgeable contents that we have seen are a necessary condition of synthesizing a rational unity of apperception (which is to say judging) already implicitly involve commitments concerning the identity and individuation of *objects* they can accordingly be understood as representing or being *about*.¹⁵⁸

Brandom’s reading of Kant’s view that representational content is to be understood in terms of the activity of synthesis brings Kant closer to the post-Kantian German Idealists, for it entails the conceptualization of matter. For example, consider the central tenet of Hegel’s Absolute Idealism, the view that, in order for the thinking subject to be able to know its object, there must be in some sense an identity of thought and being. Brandom’s reading of Kant brings him closer to this Hegelian view: if the components of thought are concepts, judgments,

¹⁵⁶ Brandom (2009), 36. See also Brandom (2011), Lecture 1, 15: “Kant understands judging in *normative* and *pragmatic* terms. On the normative side, he understands judging as *committing* oneself, taking *responsibility* for something, *endorsing* the judged content. On the pragmatic side, he understands these normative doings in *practical* terms: as a matter of what one is committed or responsible for *doing*. What one is responsible for doing is integrating the endorsed content into a constellation of other commitments that exhibits the distinctive unity of apperception. Doing that (‘synthesizing’ the unity) is extruding from the dynamically evolving unity commitments that are materially *incompatible* with the new commitment, and extracting and endorsing, so adding, commitments that are its material *consequence*.”

¹⁵⁷ Brandom (2009), 37–38.

¹⁵⁸ Brandom (2009), 43.

and inferences, then being, reference to or representation of objects, is to be understood as an aspect of thought. As Brandom puts it, reference to or representation of objects “can be made intelligible or shown to be a necessary substructure of ‘that’-intentionality, when the latter is understood in terms of the rational synthetic integrative activity that is judging.” Brandom acknowledges that his reading of Kant ignores all that he has to say about sensibility and receptivity; yet, on Brandom’s view, the line of thought about concepts, judging, apperception, and understanding “can [be considered] in abstraction from the other elements with which Kant combines it.”¹⁵⁹ It is not my aim, here, to judge whether Brandom’s reading of Kant stands up *as a reading of Kant*. My aim is only to prepare readers for the Maimonian rereading of the argumentative structure of the first *Critique* that I offer in the next section, by comparing it with contemporary readings of Kant. As I already mentioned, this reading brings Kant closer to Maimon and to the post-Kantian German Idealists, and shows that Kant has the resources to address Maimon’s key challenges; but it also puts pressure on Kant’s discursive account of human cognition.

6. Sensibility, Understanding, and Reason: The Dialectical Structure of the Transcendental Deduction

Maimon holds that assuming the idea of a fully determined logical space and forming empirical judgments which determine the concepts of objects are spontaneous activities that can only be understood in relation to each other. As we have seen, this is because, on Maimon’s view, all synthetic judgments could in principle be turned into analytic judgments, if only our finite intellect were like an infinite or intuitive intellect, capable of instantaneously traversing the infinite chain of conceptual determinations that form the complete concept of an object.¹⁶⁰ Maimon’s view on the nature and aim of synthetic judgments permits

¹⁵⁹ Brandom (2009), 43, 50.

¹⁶⁰ Eckart Förster clarifies the idea of an intuitive understanding that Kant connects with the concept of a natural end (*Naturzweck*) in §77 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*: “The idea of an intuitive understanding is the idea of an understanding ‘as an intuitive faculty which goes from the *synthetically universal* (of the intuition of a whole as such) to the particular i.e., from the whole to the parts, in which, therefore, and in whose representation of the whole, there is no contingency in the combination of the parts, in order to make possible a determinate form of the whole.’ This characterization reveals that that other understanding which we must be able to conceive in order to resolve the antinomy of the power of judgment need not in fact be a divine or causative understanding. It suffices for it to be an intuitive understanding which goes from the whole to the parts; whether it is causally responsible for the whole need not be decided.” Förster (2012), 144. See KU, 5:406.

a rereading of the role that the ideas of pure reason play in Kant's account of empirical cognition.¹⁶¹ On this rereading, the representation of the unity of space and of time, what Kant calls the figurative synthesis of the imagination, would be the intuitive form of the representation of a complete unity of our representations.¹⁶²

In my analysis of Kant's argument for the objective validity of the categories in the Transcendental Deduction, I showed that the second step in the argument revisits the Transcendental Aesthetic *from a higher standpoint* and reinterprets the forms in which things are given to us, through the representation of the unity of space and time. As Béatrice Longuenesse explains, Kant "wants to reveal in these forms the manifestation of an activity that only the Transcendental Deduction of the Categories can make explicit."¹⁶³ In a note to §26 of the Deduction, Kant states that, when space is represented as an object or formal intuition, what is given is the "*unity* of the representation."¹⁶⁴ Space, as a formal intuition, is the representation of a single space. Kant says that in the Aesthetic he ascribed this unity to sensibility in order to emphasize that it precedes all concepts. Yet if the Transcendental Deduction reveals in its first section that all unity, all combination or synthesis, is a spontaneous activity of the understanding, this insight *enables* Kant to find a term for a particular kind of synthesis that is preconceptual yet still tied to the understanding: figurative synthesis, or the synthesis of the imagination. The second step of the argument in the Transcendental Deduction thus revises Kant's initial dualistic account of the relation between sensibility and understanding.

Yet the Transcendental Deduction doesn't just look back. It also looks forward and begins to view the relation between sensibility and understanding in light of the relation of these two faculties to reason. We have seen that the first step in Kant's argument involves a teleological account of empirical cognition. We do not find unity in the sheer manifold of our representations; this synthetic activity is intelligible only on the basis of our attempt to bring representations under the unity of consciousness. Thus, in §15 Kant says that in order to understand what makes the activity of combination possible, we must "seek this unity (as qualitative), someplace higher," namely, in the transcendental unity of self-consciousness.¹⁶⁵ Yet Kant also suggests that the activity of bringing representations under the transcendental unity of self-consciousness

¹⁶¹ Cf. Franks (2002b), 62–64.

¹⁶² As I mentioned, this is what I believe Maimon means when he says that space and time serve as "negative criteria" for the completion of our knowledge. See *Logik*, V, 190–194.

¹⁶³ Longuenesse (1998), 213.

¹⁶⁴ KrV, B161.

¹⁶⁵ KrV, B131.

is itself understood only in relation to something higher. When he states that “Combination is the representation of the synthetic unity of the manifold,” this brings to mind Kant’s conception of cognition as a unified whole of connected and compared representations.¹⁶⁶ More significantly, it prefigures Kant’s account in the Transcendental Dialectic of the transcendental ideal of pure reason and its regulative use. For our purposes, it is sufficient to note that the transcendental ideal of pure reason “becomes the concept of an individual object that is thoroughly determined” in regard to the predicates that may constitute it.¹⁶⁷ This concept of an object is grounded on the principle of the unity of reason, “which always presupposes an idea, namely that of the form of a whole of cognition, which precedes the determinate cognition of the parts and contains the conditions for determining *a priori* the place of each part and its relation to the others.”¹⁶⁸ Thus, in this first section of the Transcendental Deduction, it seems that we can already find the seeds for Kant’s later views on the effects of reason on the understanding. When Kant states that combination is the representation of the synthetic unity of the manifold, he suggests that the localized activity of the understanding is only intelligible within a broader teleological framework.

In the appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic Kant clarifies for us the effects of reason on the understanding:

Thus reason really has as object only the understanding and its purposive application, and just as the understanding unites the manifold into an object through concepts, so reason on its side unites the manifold of concepts through ideas by positing a certain collective unity as the goal of the understanding’s actions.¹⁶⁹

Just as the Transcendental Deduction enables Kant to revisit the Aesthetic from a higher standpoint and reinterpret his initial dualistic account of the relation between sensibility and understanding, so that he can show that everything that may ever come before our senses must already be formed by the *a priori* categories or laws of the understanding, the Transcendental Dialectic enables Kant to revisit the Deduction from a higher standpoint and reinterpret the activity of the understanding in view of its relation to reason’s demand that we bring our concepts into a collective unity. Reason demands that our knowledge not form an aggregate of facts: if we survey the entire range of our concepts, we

¹⁶⁶ KrV, B131, and see KrV, A97.

¹⁶⁷ KrV, A574/B602.

¹⁶⁸ KrV, A645/B673.

¹⁶⁹ KrV, A644/B672.

should try to see how each of our concepts plays a distinct role in our whole body of knowledge, and we should try to see how these concepts are interrelated.¹⁷⁰

Within the Deduction we find the seeds for views that Kant expounds in the latter parts of the first *Critique*. Maimon's alternative solution to the *quid juris* question, which as we have seen requires the assumption of an identity-in-difference between our human finite intellect and the divine infinite intellect, makes it easier to find them. The passage from §15 that I just discussed is one of these seeds. Another can be found in Kant's distinction between an intuitive and discursive understanding. In §16 Kant states: "An understanding, in which through self-consciousness all of the manifold would be given, would intuit; ours can only *think* and must *seek the intuition in the senses*."¹⁷¹ We can interpret this to mean that an intuitive understanding, in thinking of itself, would think of the totality of fully determined concepts and understand the manner in which these concepts are interrelated in a single whole. An intuitive understanding is thus the concept of an individual being in possession of all reality, the concept of an *ens realissimum*. Although this intuitive understanding cannot be our aim, Kant's reference to this form of understanding in the context of the Transcendental Deduction suggests that our activity of thought, which consists in bringing representations under the unity of self-consciousness, must be guided by the representation of the kind of unity that would belong to an intuitive understanding.¹⁷²

In an enticing footnote in chapter 8 of her book *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, Longuenesse makes a similar suggestion. Referring to the representation of a "higher unity" that makes combination possible and that Kant mentions in §15 of the Transcendental Deduction, she states: "But the transcendental unity of apperception generates the a priori representation of a complete unity of our representations, *whose intuitive form is the unity of space and time*."¹⁷³ This claim suggests that the Transcendental Deduction reveals that sensibility,

¹⁷⁰ It is important to stress that, on Kant's view, this demand of reason can never be fully met. This demand of reason—that we bring our knowledge into a systematically unified body of interconnected cognitions—can be compared with what analytic philosophers call the "space of reasons."

¹⁷¹ My emphasis. KrV, B135.

¹⁷² As Eckart Förster has pointed out, Kant employs two distinct concepts to characterize the infinite understanding. See Förster (2012), 145: "First we have a non-sensible, i.e. *intellectual intuition*, for which possibility (thinking) and actuality (being) coincide. And secondly an *intuitive understanding* which goes from the intuition of the whole to its parts and thus perceives no contingency in the way the parts are assembled into a whole." The first concept (intellectual intuition) is the concept that Kant is employing in §16 of the Transcendental Deduction, for what is at stake there is the opposition between receptivity and spontaneity. The second concept (intuitive understanding), is the concept that Kant employs both in §15 of the Deduction and in the appendix to the Transcendental Dialectic, where Kant develops the notion of systematicity.

¹⁷³ Longuenesse (1998), 242. My emphasis.

understanding, and reason play distinct but complementary roles in human cognition. Human cognition requires the representation of the unity of the forms of sensibility, space and time, through which all things are given to us. It also requires the conceptual unity of the understanding, through which the manifold of given representations is brought under the transcendental unity of self-consciousness, in accordance with the categories or laws of thought. And it requires the unity of reason, which directs the activity of the understanding toward a specific goal: achieving a systematic body of knowledge. Longuenesse's claim also suggests that the Transcendental Deduction first makes something explicit that later enables Kant to formulate the regulative use of the ideas of pure reason. The representation of the unity of space and time is the intuitive form of the representation of a complete unity of our representations. Indeed, Kant suggests as much when he states that we must "*seek the intuition in the senses*."¹⁷⁴ Is this intuition that we must seek in the senses what we represent to ourselves under the concept of an intuitive intellect? If so, the Transcendental Deduction not only justifies the objective validity of the pure concepts of the understanding, but it also begins to justify the validity of the ideas of pure reason by revealing their regulative use.

This rereading of the argumentative structure of the first *Critique* would show that the ideal of an intuitive intellect in possession of all of reality—the *ens realissimum*—plays an indispensable role in Kant's account of human cognition.¹⁷⁵ This is because the *ens realissimum* is the representation of reason's demand that we bring our knowledge into a systematically unified body of interconnected cognitions, and it is only in light of reason's demand that we can understand both the activity of the understanding, which consists in bringing the manifold of given representations under the transcendental unity of apperception, and the activity of the imagination, which consists in the synthesis of an empirical manifold and in the representation of the unity of the forms of sensibility, space and time, through which all things are given to us. Yet given this rereading of the argumentative structure of the first *Critique*, what would happen if at this point we asked Kant: "Well, why heed reason's demand?" If we can't find an answer to this question, doesn't even this rereading of Kant's account of human cognition, which involves understanding the cooperation of sensibility, understanding, and reason, collapse? Moreover, if the rules governing the understanding's activity are subservient to the single rule or principle governing reason, doesn't the argument of Kant's Transcendental Deduction, his explanation of the normativity of thought, likewise collapse?¹⁷⁶ Indeed, I believe that

¹⁷⁴ KrV, B135.

¹⁷⁵ KrV, A576/B604.

¹⁷⁶ See KrV, A644/B672.

this is the kind of question that Maimon, who as we have seen is committed to finding a sufficient reason for everything that human experience involves, would ask. In the following section, I argue that the attempt to answer this question is one of the reasons why Maimon radicalizes Kant's account of the regulative use of the ideas of pure reason and reintroduces from within the critical problematic the classical metaphysical idea of an infinite intellect that creates all objects in the act of knowing them and is present in our finite intellect, an idea that Maimon develops by bringing together aspects of Spinoza's philosophy and the Kabbalah.¹⁷⁷ In the final two chapters of the book, we will see how these ideas are reworked in the writings of Schelling and Rosenzweig.

7. The Infinite Intellect

Maimon's revival of the classical metaphysical idea of an infinite intellect that creates all objects in the act of knowing them and is present in our finite intellect can be considered as an attempt to answer the question concerning why we should heed reason's demand, because it explains that demand as the human desire for union with the divine intellect, and it explains that desire as the human *telos* or perfection. Thus, in heeding reason's demand and by striving to determine the concepts of objects and bring our knowledge into a systematically unified body of interconnected cognitions, we are perfecting our intellect and realizing our highest vocation.¹⁷⁸ If the human being is created in the image of God, then we are perfect and godlike to the extent that our intellectual activity attains the kind of clarity and completeness of the divine intellect. Maimon expresses this idea by saying that "our understanding is the schema for the idea of an infinite understanding."¹⁷⁹

The idea of an intuitive intellect that creates all objects in the act of knowing them and so is one with them has Aristotelian roots, but Maimon adopts the

¹⁷⁷ See Beiser (1987), 293: "Maimon argues that some of the basic themes of the metaphysical tradition, which Kant tried so hard to discredit, are in fact necessary to the critical philosophy itself." This is the idea of an *intellectual intuition* for which possibility (thinking) and actuality (being) coincide. See KrV, B139: "An understanding . . . through whose representation the objects of the representation should at the same time exist—would not require, for the unity of consciousness, a special act of synthesis of the manifold. For the human understanding, however, which thinks only, and does not intuit, that act is necessary."

¹⁷⁸ See Socher (2006), 103.

¹⁷⁹ Tr, 2:365; ETP, 188. In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, which was published in 1793, after Kant had read the manuscript of Maimon's *Essay*, Kant says that Jesus Christ as the Son of God *schematizes* the concept of moral perfection. See RGV, 6:65.

idea from Maimonides's *The Guide of the Perplexed*.¹⁸⁰ In §68 of the *Guide*, Maimonides accepts the Aristotelian idea that the divine intellect is always active and that an active intellect is at once the intellectual subject, intellectual object, and intellectual activity:

You already know that the following dictum of the philosophers with reference to God, may He be exalted, is generally admitted: the dictum being that He is the intellect as well as the intellectually cognizing subject and the intellectually cognized object, and that those three notions form in Him, may He be exalted, one single notion in which there is no multiplicity.¹⁸¹

The infinite intellect creates all things in knowing them, for the definition or thought of an object is at the same time the law of its generation.¹⁸² If we keep in mind that, on Maimon's view, an object is nothing more than the chain of concepts that compose it, and if we consider that, on his view, the distinction between matter and form is not a real distinction, but only one of degree—matter is what has not been fully conceptualized or what lies below or beyond our conscious conceptual register—we can see that for the infinite intellect form and matter are identical, for the infinite intellect is able to instantaneously traverse the infinite chain of determinations that form the complete concept of an object.¹⁸³ This idea also helps explain how Maimon understands the relationship between the representation or concept of a thing and the thing that is represented: the thing is only outside of or beyond the representation in the sense that it is not completely presented. Yet for an infinite understanding, “the thing and its representation are one and the same.”¹⁸⁴ Thus, representation aims at presentation, and for an infinite understanding all things are fully presented.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (1979), A7, 1072b19–23: “Now thinking according to itself is of the best according to itself, and thinking in the highest degree is of that which is best in the highest degree. Thus, in partaking of the intelligible, it is of Himself that the Intellect is thinking; for by apprehending and thinking it is He Himself who becomes intelligible, and so the Intellect and its intelligible object are the same.”

¹⁸¹ Maimonides (1963), 163.

¹⁸² See Atlas (1964), 63: “[Maimon] therefore introduces the metaphysical idea of an infinite reason, in relation to which all objects are simply the products of its thought. Hence the synthetic propositions of limited, human thought, in relation to an infinite mind, are dissolvable into analytic propositions.”

¹⁸³ See Franks (2002b), 63: “What appears as matter from our ordinary, finite perspective is revealed as form from an infinite perspective that we can also occupy in mathematics.”

¹⁸⁴ Tr, 2:365; ETP, 188.

¹⁸⁵ Maimon also discusses this idea in the *Streifereien im Gebiete der Philosophie*. See Strf, IV, 42. See also Bergman (1967), 32: “The infinite mind comprehends the real object as it is, as something thought and nothing more, as something identical with the concept, just as the *intelligible* is identical with the *intelligens*. In this sense Maimon, as we will see further on, uses the term ‘real’ (*reell*). There is

Maimon conveys how he is reconceiving the relationship between the representation of a thing and the thing that is represented when he says that, in order to accept his dissolution of the question *quid juris*,¹⁸⁶

we assume an infinite understanding (at least as idea), for which the forms are at the same time objects of thought, or that produces out of himself all possible kinds of connections and relations of things (the ideas). Our understanding is just the same, only in a limited way.¹⁸⁷

Again, given Maimon's conception of the nature of real thought—an object of real thought is one produced by a synthesis of concepts in accordance with the principle of determinability—the relevant question is no longer whether we are entitled to apply forms of intelligibility to sensuously given objects.¹⁸⁸ Instead, the relevant question is whether we have achieved a real synthesis of concepts, since at least when making empirical judgments about the natural world our finite intellect cannot achieve the complete determination of each concept and retrospectively see how the infinite chain of determinations is covertly contained in the concept that is in the position of the subject of the judgment.¹⁸⁹ In other words, when making empirical judgments about the natural world, our finite intellect cannot turn synthetic judgments into analytic ones. In the passage above, Maimon is saying that we can only be assured of having achieved a real synthesis of concepts, and so of being intentionally

no duality here of a perceived object and a non-perceived object, and no intention (*intentio*) of a representation to the object. The object of our representation is only a *Schema* of the 'real' object, which is identical with the pure concept and which is fully illuminated by the light of the understanding, in the same way that our finite understanding is the *Schema* of the infinite understanding. In presentation (*Darstellung*) representation (*Vorstellung*) would have carried out its intention of reaching the object." It is in these terms that I understand Kant's claim in the Transcendental Aesthetic that "in whatever way and through whatever means a cognition may relate to objects, that through which it relates immediately to them, and at which all thought as a means is directed as an end, is intuition" (KrV, A20/B34).

¹⁸⁶ I say "dissolution," rather than "solution" because, for Maimon, there is no longer a question of how to apply concepts to sensuously given matter. As we have seen, for Maimon, matter is fully conceptualized.

¹⁸⁷ Tr, 2:64–65; ETP, 38. Maimon did not attribute to any specific philosopher his view of the human understanding as a limitation of the infinite understanding, yet Kant claimed that Maimon's answer to the question *quid juris* amounted to a form of Spinozism. See Kant *Correspondence*, 312 [Ak. 11:49–50]. For a helpful discussion of Kant's view, see Melamed (2004), 74–75.

¹⁸⁸ On Maimon's view, intuitive content can be reduced to the so-called differentials of perception. See Tr, 2:28–35; ETP, 19–23.

¹⁸⁹ See Atlas (1964), 119: "Scientific thought, which is presented in the form of a system of synthetic propositions, can claim validity only on the assumption that synthetic propositions are dissolvable into analytic propositions by the infinite mind."

related to a real object, if we assume that the infinite intellect is present in our finite intellect, or if we assume that there is an “identity-in-difference between the *forms* [or concepts] of infinite reason and the *forms* [or concepts] of finite reason.”¹⁹⁰ Thus, there are two aspects to Maimon’s conception of the infinite or divine intellect: in real thought the knowing subject is identical with the cognized object, and the human intellect is the schema or limited version of the divine intellect.¹⁹¹

Yet it is significant that, for Maimon, the epistemic status of this assumption is that of a hypothesis. When in the *Essay* Maimon explains his answer to the question concerning our ability to make empirical judgments making claims to universality and necessity, he says: “Kant shows merely the possibility of his fact [the fact that we connect forms of thought determined a priori with objects determined a posteriori in a necessary way], which he merely presupposes . . . I merely ask: what sort of hypothesis must I *adopt* in order for it to be comprehensible?”¹⁹² I believe that this statement shows that, on Maimon’s view, the principal task of the philosopher is not to answer the question *whether* we are entitled to form empirical judgments making claims to universality and necessity, but to describe the overall framework in which we *are* entitled to do so, and this descriptive method pertains not just to this particular question, but to all philosophical questions. If we accept this view on the nature of a philosophical argument, we can quickly see that a philosopher’s answers will be convincing to the extent that the philosopher’s readers are willing to adopt the overall framework or standpoint that the philosopher is offering. Yet then the philosopher must renounce the aspiration for universal consent to or acknowledgment of her arguments.¹⁹³ In the next and final section of this chapter, I argue it is in this spirit that we should understand Maimon’s skepticism, which arises from what he calls the question *quid facti*.

¹⁹⁰ Franks (2002b), 64. My emphasis. As Beiser points out, Schelling and Hegel appropriate a version of this idea. See Beiser (2002), 592: “Schelling and Hegel believed that only their objective interpretation of the principle of subject-object identity ensures the possibility of knowledge because it alone means that knowledge is not simply my knowledge—something I know to be true from my own case or my own consciousness—but the knowledge of the object itself. . . . It is clear, however, that this interpretation of the principle of subject-object identity saves the objectivity of knowledge only on the further assumption that my knowledge as a finite subject is part or a mode of absolute knowledge.”

¹⁹¹ In the *Streifereien* Maimon claims that we do meet this condition in mathematics. See Strf, IV, 42.

¹⁹² My emphasis. Tr, 2:364; ETP, 187. Interestingly, this is also how Maimon understands Leibniz’s talk of monads. See Strf, IV, 51–52.

¹⁹³ Franks makes a similar point in connection with Schelling’s “Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism.” See Franks (2005a), 328–329.

8. The Question: *Quid Facti*?

In section 1 above I said the two demands that Maimon makes on philosophy and that were subsequently appropriated by Fichte—that all a priori knowledge must be systematically derived from a single first law or principle, and that any person wishing to inhabit a philosophical system must first actualize it—correspond to the two main aspects of Maimon’s thought: his rational dogmatism and empirical skepticism. I also supported Paul Franks’s view that we should consider Maimon’s description of himself as a rational dogmatist and empirical skeptic to be an analogue to Kant’s description of himself as a transcendental idealist and empirical realist: “It is only because [Maimon] is a rational dogmatist that he can be—or, perhaps, can only be—an empirical skeptic.”¹⁹⁴ Thus far I have mainly focused on the philosophical significance of the first aspect of his thought: Maimon’s commitment to infinite intelligibility leads him to reject Kant’s conception of space and time as pure intuitions, and so to reject the crucial step in Kant’s argument for the objective validity of the categories in the Deduction. Instead of Kant’s argument Maimon addresses the worry that Kant voices in the *quid juris* question by describing a metaphysical and epistemological framework that enables us to view the categories and forms of sensibility as the conditions of possibility of all real thought and that assures us of our ability to judge or synthesize concepts correctly by assuming an “identity-in-difference between the human or finite mind and the divine or infinite mind.”¹⁹⁵ Yet is it *in fact* the case that an infinite intellect exists and that there is an identity-in-difference between the human and divine intellect? If not, then Maimon’s framework dissolves into an insubstantial dream, or in his own words, the entire structure of his thought “remains a castle in the air.”¹⁹⁶ It is in these terms that I believe we should understand the philosophical significance of Maimon’s question: *quid facti*?

Frederick Beiser believes that we should understand the significance of Maimon’s skepticism as follows:

Assuming that the idea of the infinite understanding resolves the *quid juris* (under what conditions do synthetic a priori concepts apply to

¹⁹⁴ Franks (2003), 201. On Gideon Freudenthal’s view, Maimon’s description of himself as a rational dogmatist and empirical skeptic means that the standards for real thought are available to us, but that it’s beyond our power to meet those standards. See Freudenthal (2003b), 15–17. Freudenthal’s view offers a different interpretation of the significance of Maimon’s skepticism, but not one that is incompatible with the view that I develop below; it merely provides a more complete picture of Maimon’s skepticism.

¹⁹⁵ Franks (2002b), 63.

¹⁹⁶ Strf, IV, 208.

experience?), the answer to the *quid facti* (do these conditions in fact hold?) then depends upon whether the infinite understanding exists. This is indeed the main point at issue between the dogmatist and skeptic.¹⁹⁷

Beiser holds that Maimon resolves this second question by employing the same “skeptical method” that Kant employs in the first *Critique* in order to solve the four antinomies of pure reason.¹⁹⁸ Kant solves each of the antinomies by first showing that the apparent opposition between thesis and antithesis is based on a common assumption; once we remove the assumption, we can see that the thesis and antithesis are either both in a certain sense true (in the case of the dynamical antinomies), or both false (in the case of the mathematical antinomies).¹⁹⁹ For example, in the case of the first antinomy, the thesis states that the world is finite, and the antithesis states that the world is infinite. Yet the thesis and antithesis both rest on the realist assumption that the world *in itself* is determined in its magnitude; if we eliminate this realist assumption, then we can say that the world *as appearance* is *neither finite nor infinite*, and this dissolves the apparent opposition between thesis and antithesis. Yet under what *standpoint* can we deny the assumption that the world *in itself* is determined in its magnitude? Only under the standpoint of transcendental idealism, which states that the world does not exist *in itself*, but only insofar as it is constituted in experience, so the only thing that we can say is that what is given in spatiotemporal conditions should be extended indefinitely, and beyond this *regulative principle* we cannot say anything about the magnitude of the world *as it is in itself*. This is Kant’s *critical* solution to the antinomies.

As Beiser explains, if we employ this Kantian method to answer Maimon’s question concerning the existence of the infinite intellect and the identity-in-difference between the human intellect and the divine intellect, we can see that while “the ‘dogmatic’ thesis affirms the existence of the infinite understanding by demanding completely active thought, the ‘skeptical’ antithesis denies its existence by maintaining that there is an unbridgeable gap between understanding and sensibility.”²⁰⁰ In this case, the assumption that the thesis and antithesis share

¹⁹⁷ Beiser (1987), 304. See also Atlas (1964), 107: “But what is the guarantee for the reality of such an assumption? Its only guarantee seems to reside in the recognition that without it skepticism must necessarily follow. To guard against skepticism the assumption of an infinite mind is indispensable.”

¹⁹⁸ KrV, A424/B452.

¹⁹⁹ See KrV, A528–532/B556–560.

²⁰⁰ It is worthwhile to note that what Maimon means by active thought is the complete conceptual presentation of a thing. Beiser (1987), 304. It is important to keep in mind here that, for Maimon, the difference between sensibility and understanding, or the difference between matter and form, is not one of kind, but of degree of completeness.

is that the principle in question—the demand for completely active thought, which as we have seen is Maimon’s version of reason’s demand to bring each of our concepts into a unified body of interconnected cognitions—is constitutive rather than regulative. Beiser holds that Maimon settles the dispute between the dogmatist and the skeptic by regarding the infinite intellect as a regulative principle, as a principle that does not state what exists but that prescribes a specific task as the end of inquiry. As Beiser clarifies, what this task names is “nothing less than the complete explanation of experience, whereby all contingency and givenness disappear—the explanation we would have if our understanding were in fact infinite.”²⁰¹

I believe that Beiser’s interpretation is only partly correct. It is accurate to say that, on Maimon’s view, it is a mistake to ask whether the divine intellect *exists*. As Atlas has noted, Maimon adopts Maimonides’s doctrine of homonymic terms in scripture in order to explain the relationship between the terms “God” and “existence.”²⁰² Maimonides’s central aim in the first part of *The Guide of the Perplexed* is to elucidate the meaning of biblical terms as these apply to God. He explains that when a term implying corporeality is applied to God as an incorporeal being, we should not understand the term *in the same sense* that we understand the term when it is applied to corporeal beings. For example, Maimonides interprets the biblical idea that we are created in the image of God in the sense that we share with God the *notion* in virtue of which we are distinguished as human beings: our capacity for intellectual apprehension.²⁰³ In like fashion Maimon wishes to show that if we regard the infinite intellect as a regulative principle, when we say, “God exists,” we mean this in a *different sense* than when we say that anything else exists. We mean this in the sense that the idea or *notion* of an infinite intellect *has actuality* to the extent that we adopt as an end of our own the end or task that is named by that notion, which, as Beiser clarifies, is the task of the complete explanation of experience, the kind of explanation we would have if our intellect were infinite.²⁰⁴ Thus, instead of asking whether God

²⁰¹ Beiser (1987), 305.

²⁰² See Atlas (1964), 161.

²⁰³ See Maimonides (1963), 22–23, and part I, chap. 35, 52.

²⁰⁴ Kant conceives the relation between a notion and an idea as follows: “A concept is either an empirical or a pure concept, and the pure concept, insofar as it has its origin solely in the understanding (not in a pure image of sensibility), is called *notio*. A concept made up of notions, which goes beyond the possibility of experience, is an idea or a concept of reason” (KrV, A320/B377). As we will see in chapters 5 and 6, Maimon’s view that the question we should be asking when we ask whether God exists, is whether His notion has actuality or reality, is a view that has Kabbalistic roots. In Lurianic Kabbalah, God as He is in Himself, before creation, is called *En Sof*: the Infinite, He that is without limit. The act of creation is conceived as an act of divine contraction or withdrawal (*tzimtzum*), and after creation the *En Sof* is partly realized through human action in the world.

exists, the question that we should be asking is whether the notion of an infinite intellect *actually* influences or regulates our activity.

Maimon is also influenced by Maimonides in holding that the judgment: “God exists” is an *infinite judgment* in which the two concepts do not stand in a relationship of determinability and so cannot be synthesized or brought together into a contentful thought.²⁰⁵ In *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides offers as examples of this kind of incompatibility between concepts “knowledge and sweetness” or “clemency and bitterness.”²⁰⁶ Maimon adopts this Maimonidean idea in order to clarify why we are mistaken in asking whether God exists: if we consider the concept of an infinite intellect to be a regulative idea, then the concept of existence is not in a compatible relationship with the concept about which we are inquiring.²⁰⁷ What we should be asking is whether the idea has *actuality* or *reality*, and this is a question that still needs to be raised, even if we agree to regard the concept of the infinite intellect as a regulative principle.

Notice that Beiser says that the dogmatist affirms the existence of the infinite understanding *by demanding completely active thought* and that the skeptic denies its existence *by maintaining that there is an unbridgeable gap between understanding and sensibility*. Thus, if, on Maimon’s view, assuming the idea of the infinite intellect and assuming the identity-in-difference between the divine and human intellect resolves the question concerning how we achieve a real synthesis of concepts in thought—which is his version of the concern that is raised by the question *quid juris*—the question *quid facti* cannot be answered merely by pointing out the regulative, rather than constitutive status of the idea, as Beiser suggests. This is because the regulative task that is named by the idea of the infinite intellect is not one that the skeptic upholds. This, I believe, is the real point at issue between the dogmatist and the skeptic. Unless the skeptic freely adopts the dogmatist’s *standpoint*, the entire metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical framework that Maimon is offering will, indeed, remain nothing more than a “castle in the air.” What is most interesting and puzzling about Maimon’s position is that he describes himself as both a dogmatist and skeptic, as if he understands the standpoint that he would need to adopt in order to find satisfying answers to his questions concerning the possibility of real thought, yet is ultimately unable to bring himself to adopt that standpoint. Maimon phrases the problem about the actuality of a philosophical system by saying that Kant’s deductions can at most establish a *hypothetical* judgment about the necessary conditions for a given conditioned, such as: “If experience is possible, then every

²⁰⁵ See Bergman (1967), 274–275.

²⁰⁶ Maimonides (1963), 118.

²⁰⁷ See Tr, 2:365–366; ETP, 188.

event follows from some other event according to a law.” Yet, on Kant’s view, the aim of a deduction is to establish that the conditions for a given condition are *necessary* and universally valid.²⁰⁸ What Maimon’s view that both the standpoint of the dogmatist and the standpoint of the skeptic are possible standpoints, and what his demand for the actuality of a system suggest, is that transcendental philosophy should abandon the aspiration to establish the necessity of its claims. Should it also abandon the aspiration to universality? For example, if we consider Maimon’s alternative solution to Kant’s argument in the Transcendental Deduction, it is clear that Maimon does not believe that the assumption of an identity-in-difference between the human and divine intellect is a necessary assumption—the skeptic does not assume this—yet does he believe that it is universally valid? Insofar as the assumption is an indispensable component of a standpoint that is available to every human being, we can consider it to be universally valid in the sense that it is universally permissible.²⁰⁹ Yet the fact that Maimon calls himself a rational dogmatist and empirical skeptic also opens up the possibility for different, mutually incompatible philosophical systems.²¹⁰ For these reasons, I believe that Maimon preserves a form of what Karl Ameriks describes as Kant’s “modesty.”²¹¹ As I will argue in chapters 3 and 4, one of the lessons that the post-Kantian German Idealists learn from Maimon is that our ability to make a commitment to a philosophical system is the highest expression of human freedom.²¹²

²⁰⁸ See Atlas (1964), 86: “Deduction in the Kantian transcendental sense . . . consists of a demonstration of the necessity and indispensability of a concept for the explanation of the reality of a phenomenon.” See also Franks (2005a), 204: “Anything that might helpfully be called a transcendental argument should issue in some *conditional* to the effect that some *conditioned* would be impossible, if not for some *condition*.” I clarify the general form or strategy of Kantian or transcendental arguments in chapter 3.

²⁰⁹ It is worthwhile to point out, though, that, on Maimon’s view, this leaves the skeptic with no explanation for the possibility of real thought. Franks makes a similar point in connection with the “fact of reason” in Kant’s Deduction of Freedom. See Franks (2005a), 297.

²¹⁰ See Franks (2005a), 326–329. Freudenthal makes a comparable point when explaining Maimon’s description of himself as a “rational dogmatist” and “empirical skeptic.” See Freudenthal (2003b), 15: “[Maimon] sets out to develop a daring speculative doctrine while emphasizing that it is founded on unstable ground.”

²¹¹ Ameriks (2000), 63.

²¹² Beiser rightly points out that addressing Maimon’s skepticism requires a turn to the practical. Yet I disagree with Beiser’s understanding of what this turn to the practical amounts to. On the reading that I am offering, Maimon’s skepticism enabled the post-Kantian idealists to develop the idea that a philosophical system must be actualized in freedom or practically grounded. Cf. Beiser (2003), 243: “What Maimon is proposing here is a pragmatic solution to his own skepticism. The key to our knowledge of experience, and the resolution of skeptical doubt, now lies in the field of action rather than contemplation. Rather than just thinking about the object in a new way, we must actually make the object conform to the laws of our rational activity.”

Conclusion

Kant's critical philosophy holds out the promise of thinking anew how normativity and lawfulness arise both in our theoretical and practical lives. Those of us who believe in that promise have good reason to take an interest in the thought of Salomon Maimon. This is because the three main representatives of post-Kantian German Idealism—Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel—regard themselves as Kant's true heirs, yet they also take seriously Maimon's criticism of Kant's solution to the general problem of pure reason in the first *Critique*—a problem that, as we have seen, concerns the source and force of any normative judgment.²¹³ In doing so they agree that if philosophy is to move forward and achieve its task, it must meet some version of Maimon's two demands: if philosophy is to become a genuine *Wissenschaftslehre*, or science of reason, and meet reason's demand for unconditioned explanation, it must take the form of a philosophical system. And if a philosophical system is to provide convincing answers to any of our most basic questions, it must first be proposed and actualized in freedom.

My first aim in this chapter has been to clarify the motivation for and philosophical significance of these two demands. In chapter 3, I show why the post-Kantian German Idealists find in Kant's Deduction of Freedom in the *Critique of Practical Reason* a model for their own new conception of philosophy, and in chapter 4, I explain why this leads them to claim that a German Idealist system is a "philosophy of postulates" that begins with a primordial construction whose product is our own self.

My second aim has been to clarify the manner in which, by emphasizing the regulative role of the ideas of pure reason in Kant's account of empirical cognition, Maimon enables a rereading of the argumentative structure of the first *Critique* that reveals the relationship between sensibility, understanding, and reason. This rereading would bring Kant closer to Maimon and to the post-Kantian German Idealists, yet it would also force us to radically alter our understanding of Kant's discursive account of human cognition. Nonetheless, Maimon still upholds a version of the Kantian view that ours is not an intuitive intellect. As we have seen, in order to explain our ability to synthesize concepts and achieve real thought, Maimon holds that we must assume an identity-in-difference between our finite human intellect and the divine infinite intellect. Yet to do justice to the representative character of human thought—in our thought the object always transcends

²¹³ See Schelling, ZGNP, 73–90; OHMP, 94–106, and Fichte, VDWL 184; ANPW, 4–5.

our representation of it—Maimon emphasizes the *difference* between God and human beings. As we will see in the chapters that follow, how to construe the identity-in-difference between God and human beings in a manner that explains the existence of finite beings without denying our freedom or particularity will be one of the central concerns shared by the post-Kantian German Idealists.

PART TWO

THE PRIMACY OF THE
PRACTICAL IN EARLY FICHTE
AND SCHELLING

Kant's Deduction of Freedom

The Performative and First-Personal Aspect of Transcendental Arguments

Even for the Kant of the second *Critique*, it remains one thing to show that morality rests on the principle of autonomy and quite another to show that the will is autonomous. Thus, an additional synthetic premise is required.

—Henry Allison

Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I argued that Jacobi and Maimon set the stage for the emergence of post-Kantian German Idealism by unsettling the view that Kant's critical or transcendental philosophy had developed an adequate method to reform metaphysics and meet reason's demand for unconditioned explanation. In this chapter and the next one, I turn to the philosophical methods that some of the post-Kantian German Idealists designed to meet Maimon's and Jacobi's challenges.¹ As I hope to show, Fichte and Schelling saw that only by radicalizing Kant's doctrine of the primacy of practical reason and upholding the view that reason as a whole is in some sense grounded in the practical could philosophy hope to meet reason's demand for unconditioned explanation without falling prey to a form of nihilism, and thereby solve the conflict of reason. To clarify this view, this chapter provides a Fichtean interpretation of Kant's Deduction of Freedom through the fact of reason (*Factum der Vernunft*) in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, understanding the fact of reason as the expression of an act (*eine Tathandlung*) of reason.² In the next chapter we will see that,

¹ For example, construction in intellectual intuition, determinate negation, or the method of practical postulates.

² To avoid redundancy in what follows, I will use "the Deduction of Freedom through the fact of reason" when I mean "the Fichtean interpretation of Kant's Deduction of Freedom through the

on Fichte's view, the manner in which the Deduction of Freedom explains moral obligation can be used, more generally, to explain what grounds all constraint or necessitation, both in the theoretical and practical domains.

To clarify these Fichtean ideas, I engage in the contemporary debate on the nature of transcendental arguments and make three central claims concerning the aim and method of such arguments: first, transcendental arguments are concerned with a form of skepticism that questions our grounds for holding onto our beliefs; second, such arguments function by revealing the presuppositional relations between our *commitments*, or between the concepts and beliefs that we *ascribe to ourselves*; third, such arguments cannot provide a refutation of skepticism, but only an invitation to adopt a philosophical system or standpoint, a standpoint whose value can only be determined by inhabiting it. To support these three claims, I discuss the purpose of a thought experiment that Kant introduces in §6 of the Transcendental Analytic in the second *Critique*. I contend that the purpose of this thought experiment is to elicit from us respect for the moral law. If the example does elicit such respect, it demonstrates that we have determined our freedom by accepting Kant's invitation to uphold for ourselves the idea or ideal of autonomy or rational self-determination as the highest norm for our conduct. Thus, the Deduction of Freedom affords a form of self-knowledge: it brings to consciousness a pre-reflective act of self-determination that grounds moral obligation. Or, employing Fichte's terms, the Deduction of Freedom shows that self-positing is the ground of moral obligation.

1. Transcendental Arguments

Because in recent decades philosophers working in the analytic and Continental traditions have focused attention on the idea that Kant's deductions represent a new method of philosophical argument—the method of transcendental argument—I want to mention some of the options available for characterizing transcendental arguments, and then situate my Fichtean interpretation of Kant's Deduction of Freedom among them.³ Three questions guide my discussion: What form of skepticism are the transcendental arguments that serve as a model for the German Idealist methods of philosophical argument concerned with addressing? What is the general structure and strategy of such arguments? What can they establish against skeptical doubts? I answer each of these

fact of reason (*Factum der Vernunft*), understood as the expression of an act (*eine Thathandlung*) of freedom."

³ See the contributions to Stern (1999a), which includes an extensive bibliography. See also Franks (2005a), 201–259.

questions in turn and then show how the Deduction of Freedom exemplifies this form of philosophical argument.

1.1. Normativist Justificatory Skepticism

The transcendental arguments that interest me—those for which the Deduction of Freedom through the fact of reason serve as a model—address what Robert Stern calls “normativist justificatory skepticism.”⁴ On Stern’s view, *normativist justificatory skepticism* must be distinguished from both *epistemic skepticism* and *reliabilist justificatory skepticism*. While the epistemic skeptic accuses us of “possible ignorance” by arguing that we cannot know with certainty that our beliefs are true, the justificatory skeptic accuses us of “actual dogmatism” by arguing that nothing *entitles us* to hold onto our beliefs.⁵ Stern rightly notes that the justificatory skeptic is in a “dialectically stronger position” than the epistemic skeptic.⁶ This is because we can grant the epistemic skeptic that we are fallible, that we cannot know with certainty the truth of our beliefs, but still safeguard our beliefs by showing why we are entitled to or justified in holding them. By contrast, there is no safe place to which we can retreat from the justificatory skeptic’s claim that our beliefs are grounded on nothing, nothing but our dogmatic assertion of them. Thus, the justificatory skeptic offends our cognitive self-image far more deeply than the epistemic skeptic:

We may be prepared to admit that we are cognitively limited and hence open to error; it is less easy to grant that we are epistemically irresponsible, governed by caprice, wishful thinking, or habit, rather than reason and rational principle. The justificatory skeptic therefore has a position of much greater dialectical power.⁷

We can also convey the greater dialectical power of justificatory skepticism by pointing out that epistemic skepticism is primarily a “negative position.”⁸ If the epistemic skeptic denies us knowledge, he does not do so in order to substitute for knowledge a different form of cognitive engagement with the world. By contrast, the justificatory skeptic has a positive agenda: either to force us to substitute our current beliefs for others, or to force us to concede that if we retain our current beliefs, we

⁴ Stern (2000), 34.

⁵ Stern (2000), 18.

⁶ Stern (2000), 34, 18.

⁷ Stern (2000), 18.

⁸ Stern (2000), 15.

do so on disreputable grounds—for instance, nature or habit, rather than reason.⁹

I mentioned above that Stern distinguishes *normativist* justificatory skepticism from both epistemic skepticism and *reliabilist* justificatory skepticism. Let me now explain the difference between these two varieties of justificatory skepticism and support my claim that the Deduction of Freedom is concerned with the normativist brand. Both forms of skepticism raise questions about our *grounds* for holding onto our beliefs, but they aim at different levels in our cognitive structure. The reliabilist skeptic aims at the level of our belief-forming methods: he asks us whether the methods we employ in forming our beliefs—such as perception, memory, or testimony—are reliable or conducive to truth. By contrast, the normativist skeptic aims at a level that is higher up in our cognitive structure: he does not question whether our belief-forming methods are reliable, but demands that we consider whether particular beliefs are warranted by any of the methods or practices that we already take to be normative. Stern clarifies the difference between these two varieties of justificatory skepticism when he remarks that the reliabilist skeptic treats justification as a teleological notion: “to make a belief justified, a belief-forming method must contribute towards the goal of arriving at truth (or at least, the believer must have grounds for thinking, or no grounds for doubting, that it so contributes).”¹⁰ By contrast, the normativist skeptic treats justification as a deontological notion: “a belief is justified if it fits in with the norms governing a particular belief-forming method, where the method is held to be intrinsically rational.”¹¹

Since these two forms of justificatory skepticism aim at different levels in our cognitive structure, they pose different problems when we are trying to ground our beliefs, and they demand different types of responses. The reliabilist skeptic poses a problem of circularity: Can we find an *independent* reason for taking certain belief-forming methods to be reliable, without using these methods themselves, and so falling into a vicious circle?¹² The normativist skeptic poses a narrower grounding problem: *Within* the circle of

⁹ Stern rightly emphasizes the justificatory skeptic’s positive or revisionary agenda: “justificatory skepticism has a much more obvious positive life, not just existing as a foil or puzzle to test a philosophical system, but as providing the basis for certain radical new kinds of thinking, from the *ataraxia* of Pyrrhonist skepticism to the anti-rationalism of Humean naturalism” (Stern [2000], 15).

¹⁰ Stern (2000), 26.

¹¹ Stern (2000), 26, 27. I adopt with some reservation Stern’s manner of phrasing how the normativist skeptic treats justification, for saying that a belief is justified if it fits in with the norms governing a belief-forming *method* obscures that what we need to find is something which can ground the belief, and this need not be a norm governing a method, only something that can serve as a principle or law.

¹² See Stern (2000), 25.

our belief-forming methods, can we find the principle or norm that serves to ground a particular belief or set of beliefs?¹³ If we can, then we are no longer involved in a vicious circle.

To support my claim that Kant's Deduction of Freedom is concerned with a form of normativist justificatory skepticism that casts suspicion on moral judgments, let me invite you to consider how Kant characterizes in the first *Critique* the general problem that his deductions are meant to address: "Jurists, when they speak of entitlements and claims, distinguish in a legal matter between the questions about what is lawful (*quid juris*) and that which concerns the fact (*quid facti*), and since they demand proof of both, they call the first, that which is to establish the entitlement or the legal claim, the deduction."¹⁴ We do not require a deduction of empirical concepts, for we can always appeal to experience in order to prove the objective validity of such concepts. But we do require a deduction of concepts such as "freedom," for if we cannot derive these concepts from experience, then something else must establish our entitlement to employ them (otherwise such concepts would be pseudo-concepts such as "fortune" and "fate").¹⁵ Kant is not questioning whether we can rely on experience in order to test our application of empirical concepts—as the reliabilist justificatory skeptic might do. Instead, he is looking for the reason or ground that entitles us to apply a priori concepts. In the case of the Deduction of Freedom, Kant is searching for the reason or ground that entitles us to apply the concept of transcendental freedom to ourselves, and since he holds that "[transcendental] freedom and unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other," Kant is also searching for the ground of moral obligation.

1.2. Transcendental Claims, Self-Positing, and the Synthetic Step in a Transcendental Argument

I now turn from the question concerning the form of skepticism that the transcendental arguments that serve as a model for the German Idealist methods of argumentation are meant to address, to the question concerning the general

¹³ Stern characterizes the problem that is posed by the normativist skeptic as follows: "Against the normativist sceptic, on the other hand, we need to find a way to show that particular beliefs (e.g. in the existence of other minds, or the external world and so on) can indeed be shown to be licensed by a norm, by finding grounds for these beliefs that will bring them under one such legitimate belief-forming method (e.g. by showing that our belief in the existence of the external world *has* got sufficient perceptual or inductive support to make it a legitimate belief)" (Stern [2000], 25). My reasons for characterizing as I do the problem that is raised by the normativist skeptic will become clearer when I examine the structure of the Deduction of Freedom through the fact of reason.

¹⁴ KrV, B117.

¹⁵ KrV, B117.

structure and strategy of such arguments. Kant's interpreters generally agree that a transcendental argument establishes a conditional claim to the effect that, if not for some condition, then something conditioned would be impossible.¹⁶ Such arguments work by showing that a certain item of knowledge (the conditioned) has an epistemic status that is in some way superior (because it is indubitable, unavoidable, or something to which we are committed), and then conferring the same status to the condition, which is an item of knowledge that is otherwise subject to skeptical doubt. Consider a few examples: "If experience of succession is to be possible, there must be something invariant." Or, "if experience of change is to be possible, the empirical world must be governed by causality." We can see that transcendental arguments bring to light relations of presupposition. If we wish to explain the nature of such arguments, one of our tasks will be to specify what we mean when we say that "Y" presupposes "X," or when we say that "X" is a necessary condition of "Y." In virtue of what is this relation of presupposition necessary?¹⁷ We will also need to explain how we understand the terms that are related. Are we revealing relations of presupposition between concepts, or between meaningful linguistic expressions, as P. F. Strawson believed?¹⁸ Or, for instance, are we revealing relations of presupposition between commitments, as John Haugeland has suggested?¹⁹ I address these two specific questions below,

¹⁶ See Franks (2005a), 204: "Anything that might helpfully be called a transcendental argument should issue in some conditional to the effect that some *conditioned* would be impossible, if not for some *condition*." See also Stern (2000), 6: "As standardly presented, transcendental arguments are usually said to be distinctive in involving a certain sort of claim, namely that 'For Y to be possible, X must be the case,' where Y is some indisputable fact about us and our mental life (e.g. that we have experiences, use language, make certain judgments, have certain concepts, perform certain actions, etc.), but where it is left open at this stage exactly what is substituted for X." This way of describing the structure of a transcendental argument shows the connection between Kant's transcendental arguments and his broader conception of reason. As Kant mentions in the *Dialectic* of the first *Critique*, the subjective principle for the logical use of reason is: "Find the unconditioned for conditioned cognitions of the understanding, with which its unity will be completed" (KrV, A307/B364). Yet for reasons that will become clear below, I disagree with Stern's claim that the conditioned in the conditional must be an indisputable fact about us and our mental life.

¹⁷ See Sacks (2005), 440.

¹⁸ See Strawson (1959), 35: "This gives us a more profound characterization of the skeptic's position. He pretends to accept a conceptual scheme, but at the same time quietly rejects one of the conditions of its employment. Thus his doubts are unreal, not simply because they are logically irresolvable doubts, but because they amount to the rejection of the whole conceptual scheme within which alone such doubts make sense." Strawson's point here is that a transcendental argument renders skeptical doubts idle, by showing that what the skeptic denies is a condition of her doubt making any sense. See also Strawson (1985), 23, where Strawson claims that the aim of a transcendental argument is "to establish the connections between the major structural features or elements of our conceptual scheme."

¹⁹ See Haugeland (2000), 340–343.

when I discuss the Fichtean idea that the first principle of a philosophical system must *express an act*.

For now I want to show that, *insofar as* transcendental arguments bring to light relations of presupposition, we can say that they employ a *coherentist* strategy.²⁰ Stern clarifies how this strategy can serve to address normativist justificatory skepticism. First, we must show that we can appeal to the coherence of our beliefs as a norm. The norm might be phrased as follows: "If S's belief-set is more coherent with the belief that p as a member than without it or with any alternative, then this belief is justified for S."²¹ Then, by employing a transcendental argument, we can show that the belief in question is required to consistently uphold many of our other beliefs; we can show that the skeptic can't live up to her doubt, for without the belief in question, she would have to abandon many other beliefs that form the fabric of her ordinary practices, practices which she is not calling into question and which she does not wish to give up. For example, without the belief that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points, I would have no *reason* to cut across a field. As Stern points out, this example shows that the notion of coherence to which we are appealing "is one of reason-giving: that is, abandoning one belief 'carries down' another if, in order to have any (or any sufficient reason) to believe the latter as opposed to its negation, one needs to believe the former."²² Construed in this manner, a transcendental argument is an instance of *modus tollens*: if "p" implies "q" and "q" is not true, then "p" cannot be true.²³ Yet, in the example that we are currently considering, the relation of implication is internal to our system of beliefs and practices: I cannot consistently deny that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points and then cut across a field because I believe that it is the quickest way to meet you on the other side.

²⁰ Below I argue that "integrity" or "self-positing" are more appropriate terms to employ when we are characterizing the structure or strategy of the transcendental arguments that serve as a model for the German Idealist methods of argumentation. This is because coherentist theories of epistemic justification *reject* the idea that any of our beliefs have a privileged status: the metaphor of a building as a model for the structure of knowledge is replaced by the metaphor of a ship at sea whose seaworthiness must be ensured by repairs to any parts in need of it. By contrast, a transcendental argument gives a privileged status to the *conditioned* in the *conditional*, and then it tries to confer the same status to the *condition*. As I will show below, the *conditioned* has the status of something to which I am committed. I would like to thank Sergio Tenenbaum and Paul Franks for pressing me to explain this difference between my view and Stern's.

²¹ Stern (2000), 193.

²² Stern (2000), 195.

²³ See Stroud (1999), 156. A transcendental argument can also be construed as an instance of *modus ponens* by converting a use of *modus tollens* to a use of *modus ponens* and transposition. See Sacks (2005), 442.

This point leads us to the important question whether transcendental arguments should only be construed as *belief-directed* and to the related question whether we must retreat to a weak or modest construal of such arguments.²⁴ The *locus classicus* of the view that transcendental arguments can only be belief-directed and that we must retreat to a modest construal of such arguments is Barry Stroud's 1968 article "Transcendental Arguments." There, he pointed out that Strawson's practice of "descriptive metaphysics" was too modest to characterize Kant's own effort to reform metaphysics, for Kant wished to show that "the categories are conditions of the possibility of experience, and are thus also valid *a priori* of all objects of experience."²⁵ In other words, Kant wished to infer certain necessary features of the world from the conditions of our thinking or experiencing the world. Stroud claimed that, without Kant's transcendental idealism in place, or without invoking a verification principle, Strawson's appropriation of Kant's form of argumentation could at most establish that we *must believe* the world has the features which make thought, or experience, or meaningful discourse possible.²⁶ The objection that Stroud raised against Strawson's use of Kantian arguments for the practice of descriptive metaphysics has come to be known as the problem of the *inference to reality*.²⁷ Contemporary analytic philosophers tend to capitulate and accept Stroud's claim that if we are going to make any use of transcendental arguments, we must give up on Kant's ambitious aim to reform metaphysics.²⁸ As the story goes, we must limit ourselves to revealing relationships of implication between our beliefs, showing that certain beliefs "have a special status or position in our thought" that renders them invulnerable to skeptical doubts.²⁹

Stern's employment of a coherentist strategy against normativist justificatory skepticism is clearly an instance of a modest construal of transcendental arguments. As he says:

Once it is seen that the test of coherence is one of our "deepest logical and intellectual standards and procedures," we can then employ

²⁴ Stern (2000), 10.

²⁵ KrV, B161.

²⁶ See Stroud (1968), 256.

²⁷ See the contributions to Stern (1999a), in particular Mark Sacks, "Transcendental Arguments and the Inference to Reality: A Reply to Stern." It is worth pointing out that G. E. Schulze raises a version of this problem in his *Aenesidemus*.

²⁸ See Stroud (1999), 160: "Do we have to be concerned to defend or preserve metaphysics, or perhaps even want to put it on the secure path of a science? Do we even have to believe in *a priori* knowledge at all? Maybe it is possible to describe goals or targets that certain arguments might serve, or a special status they might show certain things to have, that would be transcendental in a recognizably Kantian sense without their having to vindicate the whole *Critique of Pure Reason*."

²⁹ Stroud (1999), 165.

a belief-directed transcendental argument against the justificatory skeptic, to show how a certain type of belief meets that standard. In this context, there is no need to try to use a transcendental argument that is more ambitious. We may therefore accept the objection that transcendental arguments can only be made plausible in this modest form, whilst denying that this renders them impotent.³⁰

I believe that Stern is driven to a modest construal of transcendental arguments because he does not take seriously enough the objection that he has not explained *why* the test of coherence constitutes a norm or principle of justification. As the first sentence in the passage cited above suggests, Stern holds that, in order to explain why we can appeal to the test of coherence as a norm, it is sufficient to point out that it is one of our “deepest intellectual procedures,” just as, in order to justify a belief, it is sufficient to reveal the position that it holds in our belief system.³¹

Let me offer an alternative explanation for why we can appeal to the test of coherence as a norm by drawing on Dieter Henrich's essay “The Concept of Moral Insight and Kant's Doctrine of the Fact of Reason.” My discussion of Henrich's essay also offers an answer to the two questions I raised above: in virtue of what are the presuppositional relations between the terms of a Kantian or transcendental argument necessary? How should we characterize the terms that are so related? In light of my discussion, it will turn out that integrity, “the I,” or “self-positing,” *rather than* “coherence,” are more appropriate terms to employ when we are describing the principle or norm to which we can appeal against the normativist justificatory skeptic. The central sections in Henrich's essay reconstruct Kant's solution to what he called the “philosopher's stone”—the puzzle of how the moral law can have the power to move us, for as Kant says, although I may “judge by the understanding that an action is morally good there is still a great deal missing concerning the actual doing of the act that I have judged to be good.”³² Henrich suggests that in solving this puzzle, Kant realized that there is an important difference between the interest of reason in its theoretical capacity and the interest of reason in its practical capacity. Moreover, Henrich suggests that this realization is what forced Kant to abandon his attempts to provide a deduction of morality from theoretical reason, in works leading up to but not including the *Critique of Practical Reason*.³³ As Henrich explains, the idea that is

³⁰ Stern (1999b), 57.

³¹ Stern (2000), 214. Here it is worth noting that Brandom also ascribes to Kant a coherentist strategy: as I mentioned in the previous chapter, Brandom holds that, on Kant's view, representational purport is to be understood *normatively* and *pragmatically*, in terms of the activity of synthesizing an original unity of apperception. See Brandom (2009), 37–38.

³² Henrich (1994), 73.

³³ Henrich (1994), 73–82.

at the heart of Kant's early attempts at a deduction of morality from theoretical reason, is that reason, as the faculty of laws or principles, is repelled by lawlessness in any form, including the lawless exercise of freedom:

The faculty of order, *ratio*, possesses a *horror vacui*, a fear of all that is without a rule. . . . The resistance of thinking to thoughtlessness also produces a feeling of displeasure among our emotions; and thus a chaotic character and indecisive acting may provide us occasion for uneasiness about a disorderly life. This might have the consequence that the subjectivity of the self attempts to avoid contradiction; and this might lead to a behavior that could be called moral in the sense of the categorical imperative.³⁴

Pursuing this line of thought, it seems that the *horror vacui* of reason might help us understand the motivating power of the categorical imperative, which demands we give our maxims the form of universal law.³⁵ Just as reason in its theoretical capacity is interested in ensuring the agreement and coherence of our beliefs, so reason in its practical capacity is interested in ensuring the agreement and coherence of our maxims for action.

Yet, as Henrich points out, our wish to remove the displeasure that is caused by any form of lawlessness might explain why we would be willing to overcome some "limited kinds of resistance" that sensual interests "put in the way of regular action" (as in cases when it is a matter of restricting self-love), but this wish can hardly explain why we would be willing to overcome *all* our sensuous interests in cases when this is what the moral law requires (when it is a matter of choosing between obeying the moral law and life itself).³⁶ Moreover, our interest in consistency is not sufficient for moral action, for while actions that are lawful correspond to the categorical imperative in a formal sense, they do not "originate from moral reasons and motives," and, on Kant's view, an action lacks moral content if it is not done *from duty*, even if it is in conformity with duty.³⁷ Thus, the normative force of the moral law and its power to move us cannot be explained on the basis of reason's demand that everything have the unity of rule. The binding power of the moral law must be explained, instead, on the basis of a different form of contradiction: *self*-contradiction, or a contradiction *that implicates the self*. While the phenomenon of rational constraint exists both in the theoretical

³⁴ Henrich (1994), 75.

³⁵ KpV, 5:35.

³⁶ See KpV, 5:73.

³⁷ Henrich (1994), 75.

and practical domains, Henrich contends that in the latter it exists *in virtue of the self*.³⁸ As Henrich remarks:

Thinking and its laws do not require the approval of the self in order to be evident truth. Approval is the answer to the demand with which the good confronts the self. However, pure thought, though it is thought by the self, does not have selfhood in this sense.³⁹

In this passage Henrich finds Kant's solution to the philosopher's stone. The moral law has the power to move us and make determinate demands on our nature because selfhood is implicated in moral judgment, or because moral judgment is the site where the good confronts the self and demands its approval. To be a self, Henrich suggests, is to constitute oneself in pursuit of the good; and moral judgment is the means by which the good becomes manifest.⁴⁰

Let me develop the idea that moral judgment is the means by which the good becomes manifest. In chapter II of the *Analytic of Pure Practical Reason* of the second *Critique*, Kant makes the following important claim:

The only objects of a practical reason are therefore those of the good and the evil. For by the first is understood a necessary object of the faculty of desire, by the second, of the faculty of aversion, both, however, in accordance with a principle of reason.⁴¹

The good is a necessary object of the faculty of desire in accordance with a principle of reason because when we judge whether a desire we have should be realized, or, more specifically, when we judge whether our end could be an "object of *pure* practical reason," what we are considering is, as Kant says, "the possibility or impossibility of *willing* the action by which, if we had the ability to do so . . . a certain object would be made real."⁴² What we are considering is not the "physical possibility" of the action, whether the action is *within our power*, but the "moral possibility" of the action, "whether we could *will* an action that is directed to the existence of an object if the object were within our power."⁴³

³⁸ As we will see below, Fichte offers a single explanation for the phenomenon of rational constraint, both in the theoretical and practical domains, and connects both to the act of self-positing. Given Kant's view that the synthetic activity of the understanding is an operation through which we "bring the manifold of given representations under [the] unity of apperception" (KrV, B135), I'm not sure I see why Henrich holds that it is only in the practical domain that the phenomenon of rational constraint exists in virtue of the self.

³⁹ Henrich (1994), 81.

⁴⁰ In chapters 5 and 6 we will see that Schelling and Rosenzweig develop this idea into the view that human persons individuate themselves in relation to the divine person.

⁴¹ KpV, 5:58.

⁴² KpV, 5:58.

⁴³ KpV, 5:58.

When the ground of choice and volition is empirical, we can only apply to the object of our action the concept of the *agreeable*; this is because we cannot see a priori which representation will be accompanied with *pleasure* and which with *displeasure*.⁴⁴ But when the ground of choice and volition lies in an a priori law, we can apply to the object of our action the concept of the *good*; this is because we judge the action is “good in itself,” that it has its value within itself.⁴⁵ This shows that the moral law, the supreme principle of pure practical reason, serves as a criterion that helps us determine the concept of the good: when we act in conformity with the moral law, we take it to be the case that there is a sufficient reason for us to realize our ends, and we take both the act that would realize our end and the end itself to be good. As Stephen Engstrom has argued, Kant’s discussion of the concept of the good shows that there is a more “intimate connection between the moral law and the concept of the good” than is often noted; on his view, and on the view I want to defend, the moral law is not only a categorical imperative for action, but a “criterion of validity for the employment of the concept of the good.”⁴⁶

In *Self-Constitution*, Christine Korsgaard offers a solution to the puzzle of moral motivation similar to Henrich’s. In the context of discussing her views on the purpose or aim of virtuous action, she observes: “When an agent finds that she must will a certain maxim as a universal law, she supposes that the action it describes has [a specific] kind of value.”⁴⁷ In making this observation, Korsgaard conveys the idea that it is by making moral judgments and by deciding which maxims we can or cannot give the form of a universal law that we determine what we value: only the maxims we can give the form of a universal law can express what we should value. Moreover, Korsgaard believes that it is by enacting and determining what we value that we constitute ourselves as particular persons.⁴⁸ Building on these ideas, Korsgaard argues that our practical identities “are standing sources of incentives.”⁴⁹ In other words: the fact that being a person involves having reasons to act, together with the fact that we must constitute ourselves as particular persons, can help us understand the motivating power of the moral law. If we keep in mind Henrich’s and Korsgaard’s solutions to the philosopher’s stone, we can see that *self*-contradiction not only creates cognitive dissonance but also the experience that we are failing to constitute ourselves as

⁴⁴ KpV, 5:58.

⁴⁵ KpV, 5:59.

⁴⁶ Engstrom (1992), 748.

⁴⁷ Korsgaard (2009), 11.

⁴⁸ See Korsgaard (2009), 25: “In order to be a person—that is, to have reasons—you must constitute yourself as a particular person.”

⁴⁹ Korsgaard (2009), 22.

particular persons. *Self*-contradiction involves much more than the experience of incoherence; it is the experience that we are failing to attain our humanity or selfhood. As we will see in greater detail below, a thought like this one is contained in Kant's claim that the moral law's "negative effect upon feeling" is called "humiliation (intellectual contempt)."⁵⁰ Unlike guilt, which is a feeling that we experience in relation to particular actions, humiliation is a feeling that covers our self as a whole.

We are now prepared to address the question that led me to discuss Henrich's essay: Why can we appeal to the test of coherence as a norm? Not because it is one of our "deepest intellectual procedures," but because being a self involves giving our beliefs and actions the form of a coherent whole, and because this practice is the means whereby the self approves and cognizes the good (in the case of practical judgment).⁵¹ If we agree with Henrich's reconstruction of Kant's solution to the philosopher's stone, we may say, employing Fichte's terminology, that the moral law has the power to move us if and when we posit ourselves *as* self-positing.⁵² A transcendental argument is required not only to reveal the "rational structure of our belief system," as Stern believes, but also to show that self-positing is the *ground* of all other positing.⁵³ We can see, then, that a transcendental argument provides a form of self-knowledge: it shows that it is *in virtue of the self's relationship with itself* that the relations of presupposition between the concepts and beliefs of each person are necessary.⁵⁴ Consequently,

⁵⁰ KpV, 5:76.

⁵¹ Stern (2000), 214. See Korsgaard (2009), 21: "Such identities are the sources of our reasons, but of course the idea is not just that we decide which ones we want and conform to them. We have many particular practical identities and so we also face the task of uniting them into a coherent whole." See Engstrom (2009), 50: "Now a judgment that determines what it would be good on the whole to do and through this determination results, wherever possible, in the efficacy of its specification is the sort of judgment in which what Kant calls 'practical knowledge'—efficacious knowledge, knowledge of the good, or of 'what ought to be'—consists (cf. Bix-x, A633/B661, KpV, 46). Such a judgment may therefore be called a *practical judgment*. As practical, it has the same self-conscious efficacy that belongs to practical thought, the efficacy that lies in the subject's act of attaching a practical predicate to itself, except that in this case *the attachment is an act of cognition of the good*, where the consciousness of efficacy, and therein the efficacy itself, originates in the consciousness of goodness."

⁵² See WLnM, 346; FTP, 114: "The I becomes an I only by means of an act of self-positing. It is not already a substance in advance of this act of self-positing; instead, its very essence is to posit itself as positing."

⁵³ Stern (2000), 206.

⁵⁴ Yet it is important to note that, on Fichte's view, selfhood is constituted by the relation between the *infinite* self and the *finite* self. Thus, when Fichte says that the self posits itself *as* self-positing, he means that the finite self posits or locates itself in relation to the infinite self, which it posits. See GW; FSK, part III. In chapter 4, I clarify some of the motivations for this dimension of Fichte's conception of selfhood. In chapters 5 and 6, I show how Schelling and Rosenzweig develop this aspect of Fichte's thought. See Franks (2005a), "transcendental self-knowledge is the I's knowledge of the I *in itself*."

the relations of presupposition that the argument reveals are not only relations between concepts and beliefs, but also relations between concepts and beliefs that we *ascribe to ourselves*.

Let me unfold the ideas in the previous paragraph, since doing so will clarify my claim that Stern is driven to a modest construal of transcendental arguments because he does not sufficiently explain why we can appeal to the test of coherence as a norm. Fichte's notion of self-positing is notoriously hermetic, yet I believe that we can understand what Fichte means if we think of self-positing as the act of owning or ascribing to ourselves responsibility for all our existential commitments.⁵⁵ The notion of an existential commitment that I am employing is informed by John Haugeland's use of the term:

Existential commitment . . . is no sort of obligation but something more like a dedicated or even a devoted way of living: a determination to maintain and carry on. It is not a communal status at all but a resilient and resolute first-personal stance. . . . Such commitment is not "to" other players or people, or even to oneself, but rather to an ongoing, concrete game, project, or life. Thus, it is no more a psychological or an intentional state than it is a communal status; rather it is a way, a style, a mode of playing, working, or living—a way that relies and is prepared to insist on that which is constitutive of its own possibility, the conditions of its intelligibility.⁵⁶

What I wish to retain from this passage is the idea that an existential commitment is a commitment to an ongoing project or form of life, as well as an insistence on the conditions that are *constitutive* of its own possibility or intelligibility. For instance, if I am committed to the discipline and practice of philosophy, I am also committed to the conditions that are constitutive of its own possibility and intelligibility: valuing education; taking seriously my role as a student or teacher; assisting my friends and colleagues in pursuing their projects and intellectual endeavors. These commitments are *constitutive*, for they are the conditions that enable the world of philosophy—reading, writing, conversing, attending seminars, participating in conferences, applying for grants—to come into view as a meaningful whole.

Some may find it helpful to consider the notion of an existential commitment in the terms that Korsgaard employs in *Self-Constitution*, where she contends that we constitute our practical identities by *valuing ourselves* under certain

⁵⁵ In chapters 5 and 6, we will see that, on Schelling and Rosenzweig's view, it is not only a matter of owning responsibility for all of our existential commitments, but also of believing that in doing so we become vehicles for the self-disclosing of the Absolute.

⁵⁶ Haugeland (2000), 341.

descriptions and by *assuming responsibility* for the values that we endorse in doing so. As she observes, “Valuing yourself under a certain description consists in endorsing the reasons and obligations to which that way of identifying yourself gives rise.”⁵⁷ If I am committed to identifying myself as a philosopher, or as an American and Mexican citizen, or as a good friend, each of these commitments gives rise to different obligations and reasons for acting. It is important to note, though, that Korsgaard regards the commitment to one form of practical identity, namely, to “our identity as rational or human beings,” as a condition of possibility for all our other commitments.⁵⁸ Korsgaard expresses this view in the following passage:

So in valuing ourselves as the bearers of contingent practical identities, knowing, as we do, that these identities are contingent, we are also valuing ourselves as rational beings. For by doing that we are endorsing a reason that arises from our rational nature—namely, our need to have reasons. And as I’ve just said, to endorse the reasons that arise from a certain practical identity just is to value yourself as the bearer of that form of identity. We owe it to ourselves, to our own humanity, to find some roles that we can fill with integrity and dedication. But in acknowledging that, we commit ourselves to the value of our humanity just as such.⁵⁹

If we agree that the plight of a human being is to have reasons to act, then our need to have reasons to act is itself a reason to value ourselves as rational beings: our need to have reasons to act is a reason to commit ourselves to the value of our humanity or rationality, and valuing our humanity or rationality consists in endorsing the obligations to which that way of identifying ourselves gives rise—for instance, valuing our rationality gives rise to the requirement that we give our maxims the form of a universal law. The claim that I am making is that we can understand the notion of an existential commitment along the lines of what Korsgaard believes valuing ourselves under certain descriptions or practical identities involves. Moreover, I believe that we can better understand the Fichtean idea that self-positing is the ground of all other positing if we keep in mind Korsgaard’s view that committing ourselves to the value of our humanity or rationality as such is the commitment that grounds our commitment to all our contingent practical identities, as well as to their accompanying responsibilities and obligations.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Korsgaard (2009), 24.

⁵⁸ Korsgaard (2009), 22.

⁵⁹ Korsgaard (2009), 24–25.

⁶⁰ It is important to note, though, that Fichte’s view that self-positing is the ground of all other positing requires a conception of selfhood that is not required by Korsgaard’s view that committing

Paul Franks also employs the notion of an existential commitment to elucidate Fichte's conception of self-positing. In doing so, he helps us understand the idea that self-positing is the ground of all other positing:

We are now prepared to make sense of Fichte's central claim: that the immediate actuality that grounds the capacity for attaching the "I think" is "*an act of self-positing as positing*." What Fichte means is that the immediate actuality is an existential commitment with respect to oneself as the agent engaged in making existential commitments, predications, or inferences. . . . Any other existential commitment must presuppose existential commitment by the rational agent to herself as the positing agent. . . . Attending to the literal meaning of "setzen"—a commonplace German word meaning "to place" or "to locate"—*I propose that we construe Fichtean positing as locating within what analytic philosophers call the space of reasons*.⁶¹ Thus, to posit a thing relatively or conditionally is to specify the location of that thing within the *omnitudo realitatis*, understood as a network of possible (existential, predicative, and inferential) commitments—a location that may be occupied only by a possible thing of a specific kind.⁶²

In this passage and in the pages leading up to it, Franks explains why Fichte says that both consciousness of the moral law and "pure consciousness"—or "pure self-consciousness"—involve intellectual intuition.⁶³ On Franks's view, the form of immediacy that Fichte has in mind when he employs the term "intuition" is our capacity for *immediate self-ascription*.⁶⁴ Moreover, Fichte employs this term to convey the idea that our capacity for immediate self-ascription is *actual* or *unconditioned*. To see why this is so, we need to keep in mind that, for Kant, cognition (*Erkenntnis*) requires both concepts and the application of concepts to *actuality* via intuition. So Fichte means two things when he says that pure consciousness or pure self-consciousness involves intellectual intuition: first, anything that can be an object of consciousness for me—any intentional act with representational content—must be capable of being traced back to an immediate

ourselves to the value of our humanity or rationality is the commitment that grounds our commitment to all our contingent practical identities, as well as to their accompanying responsibilities and obligations. As I noted earlier, on Fichte's view, selfhood is constituted by the relation between the *infinite* self and the *finite* self. When Fichte says that the self posits itself *as* self-positing, he means that the finite self posits or locates itself in relation to the infinite self, which it posits.

⁶¹ My emphasis.

⁶² Franks (2005a), 307–308.

⁶³ See Franks (2005a), 301–307.

⁶⁴ It is important to keep in mind here that, for Kant, immediacy and singularity are the marks of an intuition. See KrV, A32/B48.

or unconditional act of self-ascription, and second, pure consciousness or pure self-consciousness involves the *reflective awareness* of my act of self-ascription as the *actual ground* of any other possible intentional acts with representational content.⁶⁵ Thus, the space of reasons that each of us inhabits, the network of possible (existential, predicative, and inferential) commitments, involves a twofold existential commitment: to ourselves as the agents engaged in making existential commitments, predications, or inferences, and to the practices and beliefs to which we are committed. When we arrive at this form of self-awareness, we posit ourselves as positing and discover the *actual ground* of all our existential commitments.

If we are brought to this form of self-awareness by means of a transcendental argument, then we shouldn't retreat to a modest construal of such arguments. This is because positing ourselves as positing means realizing that our existential commitments are *constitutive* or *world-involved*. Mark Sacks explains the idea that transcendental arguments are world-involved—and so can do more than reveal the relations of presupposition between our concepts or beliefs—in the following passage:

If the appearance-reality gap is thought of as that between how things appear to us, and how they are in themselves (i.e. the phenomenal-noumenal gap) then, Kant concedes, we indeed cannot cross it. But, given transcendental idealism, that still leaves room for a perfectly adequate sense in which that gap can be traversed: from beliefs, to the external world they are about.⁶⁶

Sacks is reminding us that transcendental arguments can do more than reveal the relations of implication between our beliefs, *given transcendental idealism*. Yet isn't Stroud's objection to Strawson's appropriation of Kant's form of argumentation for the practice of descriptive metaphysics—the objection that forces some of Kant's readers to a modest construal of transcendental arguments—precisely that Strawson is trying to have his cake and eat it too: to give up on defending transcendental idealism but uphold the metaphysical impetus of Kant's arguments? I agree with Stroud and Sacks that we must keep transcendental idealism in place

⁶⁵ In *The Form of Practical Knowledge*, Stephen Engstrom characterizes an intention as the act of ascribing to ourselves a practical self-conception, and hence as a form of self-specification. See Engstrom (2009), 33: "It follows too that, as the agent's *own* efficacious specification of what it means to do, intention can also be characterized as the *self-specification* of this practical self-conception, an act that might also be described as a practical subject's attachment of a practical predicate to itself. For an action to be voluntary in the more robust sense just outlined, then, is for it to spring from an intention, or an exercise of practical thought in which one attaches to oneself a conception of some action—a practical predicate—and therein efficaciously specifies what one means to do."

⁶⁶ Sacks (1999), 68.

if we wish to retain the more ambitious, world-directed, construal of transcendental arguments. Yet I also believe that the Fichtean idea that self-positing is the ground of all other positing can help us understand anew the manner in which transcendental arguments rely on transcendental idealism.

To see why, I return to the interpretation of Kant's central doctrine proposed in chapter 1. There, I said that by "real," Kant means something that is explanatorily basic, and that by "ideal," he means something that is explained by something else. Keeping these distinctions in mind, when Kant says that the world of appearances is both empirically real and transcendently ideal, he means that, within the context of everyday life and science, the empirical world has a fundamental explanatory role and is not derivative of anything else. Yet, within the context of transcendental philosophy, the empirical world has to be explained as the appearance that is derivative and grounded on something else, something that plays a fundamental explanatory role. Fichte's notion of self-positing can help us better understand what plays that fundamental explanatory role: "an existential commitment with respect to oneself as the agent engaged in making existential commitments."⁶⁷ Thus, just as the transcendental idealist can be an empirical realist, the self posits a network of existential, predicative, and inferential commitments that form a spatiotemporal whole—a real world. If we accept this idea, we will see that a transcendental argument is not *belief-directed*, but both *world-directed* and *self-directed*, for the argument reveals the constitutive relationship between the self and the world.⁶⁸ The self constitutes by its

⁶⁷ Franks (2005a), 307.

⁶⁸ Quassim Cassam distinguishes "world-directed" from "self-directed" transcendental arguments by saying that while the former "tell us something about the nature of the world in which our thinking and experiencing takes place," the latter "tell us something about the cognitive faculties of the thinking or knowing self." Moreover, while "world-directed" transcendental arguments are intended as antiskeptical, "self-directed" transcendental arguments are not so intended, for the starting point of the latter is a cognitive achievement whose actuality the skeptic might deny. See Cassam (1999), 83–85. My use of the distinction between "self-directed" and "world-directed" transcendental arguments is informed by Cassam's distinction but does not neatly map onto his use of the distinction, for I am proposing that these are two aspects of the same argument, which map onto Fichte's conception of an act of self-positing as positing. Robert Brandom's functionalist or pragmatic interpretation of Hegel's central arguments in the introduction to the *Phenomenology* can also help us understand the sense in which transcendental arguments are *self-directed* and *world-directed*. In his 2011 Munich lectures, Brandom argues that one of the main aims of the introduction to Hegel's *Phenomenology* is to construe the distinction between appearance and reality as a distinction that arises for consciousness in virtue of what it does, namely, judge. See Brandom (2011), Lecture 2, 10: "By contrast, what things are to consciousness is a functional matter of how they are implicitly taken or practically treated by consciousness. In what it does, consciousness practically distinguishes between what things are for it and what they are in themselves: between appearances and reality. Consciousness, he says, is their comparison. We must understand how what consciousness does that is essential to its being intelligible as consciousness can be understood as practically acknowledging this distinction." Brandom also holds that his view that there is a "practical sense-dependence"

commitments the world that it inhabits, but the world also gives content to and legitimizes its commitments.⁶⁹

This way of understanding the manner in which transcendental arguments rely on transcendental idealism also helps us see why they are a genuinely novel form of philosophical argument. We saw earlier that a belief-directed construal of a transcendental argument differs in no significant way from an instance of *modus tollens* since the argument merely makes explicit the implicit relationships of implication between our beliefs. Yet Kant's critical philosophy is concerned with explaining the possibility of *synthetic* a priori judgments, which are not judgments of *clarification*, but of *amplification*.⁷⁰ As Mark Sacks points out:

Making implicit logical entailment explicit may, to put it in Kant's terms, increase our explicative knowledge, but we are looking for expansive or ampliative knowledge. There must then be some point at which the process of simple deductive inference is disrupted, and a synthetic or ampliative move is made.⁷¹

Sacks construes transcendental arguments in the form of an extended *modus ponens*, where "p" is a premise that the skeptic cannot fail to accept, and "s" is a proposition that the skeptic typically denies.⁷²

Yet he rightly insists that in order for the argument to be *ampliative* or *genuinely informative*, there must be at least one step whose truth cannot be established purely by logical entailment or deductive inference. As he says, "There must then be some point at which the process of simple deductive inference is disrupted, and a synthetic or ampliative move is made."⁷³ We must then explain how we understand the truths that comprise these central steps in a transcendental argument. I propose that we construe the synthetic or ampliative move in a transcendental argument as an act of immediate self-ascription, as the

between the activity of judging and the world about which judgments are made helps us understand the meaning of Hegel's idealism. See Brandom (2011), Lecture 2, 18.

⁶⁹ See De Pierris (1992), 19–20: "This positive claim of the Copernican revolution is the claim that the *a priori* constitutes experience or the object of knowledge. . . . The negative claim of the Copernican revolution is directed exclusively against rationalism. This is the claim that only experience (containing sensation) can give content to the *a priori* and can legitimize it as knowledge."

⁷⁰ See KrV, A7/B11.

⁷¹ Sacks (2005), 441.

⁷² See also Taylor (1978–79), 151: "The arguments I want to call 'transcendental' start from some feature of our experience which they claim to be indubitable and beyond cavil. They then move to a stronger conclusion, one concerning the nature of the subject or his position in the world. They make this move by a regressive argument, to the effect that this stronger conclusion must be so if the indubitable fact about experience is to be possible (and being so, it must be possible)."

⁷³ Sacks (2005), 441.

adoption of a philosophical system or standpoint, or employing Fichte's terms, as an act of positing *as* self-positing. What this involves is ascribing to myself the propositional content of the conditional claim that forms the synthetic or ampliative move in the argument.⁷⁴

Sacks conveys a similar idea when he says that we can better understand the genuinely informative or ampliative nature of these central steps in a transcendental argument by introducing the notion of a *situated thought*. On Sacks's view, situating a thought requires "shifting from the conceptual level to something like the phenomenological level, the level of experience." If we fail to perform this shift, we will understand what is being said, but not the "*a priori* ground for its being true."⁷⁵ Without performing this shift, what is being said will be nothing to me.⁷⁶ Thus, situating a thought involves "representing in thought a situated construal of a propositional content: considering what it would be like to be so situated as to have an experience of that content."⁷⁷ Sacks invites us to consider the idea that what determines the truth value of these central steps in a transcendental argument is the act of ascribing to myself the propositional content of the conditional claim.

I have now answered two of my three guiding questions. The transcendental arguments that serve as a model for the German Idealist methods of philosophical argumentation are concerned with normativist justificatory skepticism; their aim is to reveal the reason or principle that grounds a particular belief or set of beliefs. Insofar as such arguments bring to light the presuppositional relations between our concepts or beliefs, we can say that they employ a *coherentist* strategy. Yet in order for such arguments to be ampliative or genuinely informative, these

⁷⁴ I would like to distinguish between two different senses in which transcendental arguments involve self-ascription. There is a sense in which all inferences—including *modus ponens*, or what Kant calls inferences of the understanding—involve self-ascription: when I perform any simple inference (for example: "if it is raining outside, I should bring an umbrella; it is raining outside, so I should bring an umbrella"), part of what I'm recognizing is that these ideas or thoughts must cohere in a single mind. This is part of what I have in mind when I say that self-positing, rather than coherence, is the norm to which we should appeal in order to answer normative justificatory skepticism. Yet this more minimal form of self-positing is different from the act of ascribing to myself a philosophical system or standpoint. I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for inviting me to clarify this point.

⁷⁵ Sacks (2005), 443.

⁷⁶ See KrV, B138: "The first pure cognition of the understanding, therefore, on which the whole of the rest of its use is grounded, and that is at the same time also entirely independent from all conditions of sensible intuition, is the principle of the original synthetic unity of apperception. . . . The synthetic unity of consciousness is therefore an objective condition of all cognition, not merely something I myself need in order to cognize an object but rather something under which every intuition must stand *in order to become an object for me*, since in any other way, and without this synthesis, the manifold would not be united in one consciousness."

⁷⁷ Sacks (2005), 444.

presuppositional relations must be shown to hold *in virtue of the self's relationship with itself*. Thus, the presuppositional relations that the arguments reveal are not only relations between concepts and beliefs, but also relations between concepts and beliefs whose propositional content we *ascribe to ourselves*. Because the argument reveals that this act of self-ascription is what grounds a particular belief or set of beliefs, it affords a form of self-knowledge. Or, employing Fichte's language, by reading the argument, we posit ourselves *as* self-positing.

1.3. Refutation or Invitation?

If we now ask what these transcendental arguments can establish against skeptical doubts, it should be clear that they are not able to *refute* the skeptic.⁷⁸ This is because these arguments do not start from a claim that the skeptic already accepts, and then move with no disruption through a series of valid inferences to a conclusion that the skeptic denies. Instead, they begin by summoning the reader to enter into a self-relation that potentially transforms their self-conception. As Fichte enjoins his students: "Attend to yourself; turn your gaze from everything surrounding you and look within yourself."⁷⁹ It is only if and when this transformation in the student's self-conception comes about that they are able to enter the philosopher's chain of deductions. Thus, the arguments we are considering do not provide a refutation of skepticism, but an invitation to adopt a philosophical system or standpoint that the reader is free to accept or reject, whose value can be determined only by inhabiting it. If the argument convinces us, then its first premise expresses the manner in which we have determined our freedom.

Let me now turn to Kant's Deduction of Freedom through the fact of reason in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and show how a Fichtean interpretation of it instantiates the kind of transcendental argument I have just characterized.

2. The Performance of Reason in the Deduction of Freedom

At first blush, it seems like the second *Critique* marks a turning point in Kant's views on the necessity and possibility of finding justifying grounds for the moral

⁷⁸ The view on the aim of transcendental arguments that I am rejecting is a view like P. F. Strawson's. As I mentioned, Strawson argued that transcendental arguments render skeptical doubts idle by showing that what the skeptic denies is a condition of her doubt making any sense. See note 18 of this chapter.

⁷⁹ VDWL 186; ANPW, 7.

law.⁸⁰ In works leading up to the second *Critique*, Kant first sought to establish that we are free or spontaneous—independent from natural causality—and then use the fact of our spontaneity to ground morality. Yet in the second *Critique*, Kant appeals to the moral law as a “fact of reason” that “forces itself upon us,” and he warns us not to seek in vain for a “deduction of the moral principle.”⁸¹ Instead, he says, the moral principle “itself serves as the principle of the deduction of . . . the *faculty of freedom*, of which the moral law, which itself has no *need of justifying grounds*, proves not only the possibility but the reality in beings who cognize the law as binding upon them.”⁸² Based on these claims, a coterie of interpreters protest that in the second *Critique* Kant gives up on the attempt to ground moral obligation and returns to a form of precritical dogmatism.⁸³ I hope to show that Fichte gives us the conceptual resources for interpreting Kant’s claims in a manner that is consistent with the spirit of Kant’s critical philosophy.

In his *Review of Aenesidemus* (1794), Fichte remarks that the first principle of a philosophical system “does not have to express a fact just as content [*eine Tatsache*, actual fact]; it can also express a fact as performance [*eine Tathandlung*, actual deed].”⁸⁴ In recent decades, some attention has been given to the idea that Kant’s Deduction of Freedom requires that the reader perform in a certain manner. For example, in *Kant’s Theory of Freedom*, Henry Allison states: “Even for the Kant of the second *Critique*, it remains one thing to show that morality rests on the principle of autonomy and quite another to show that the will is autonomous. Thus, an additional synthetic premise is required.”⁸⁵ If we keep in mind Mark Sacks’s view that the *ampliative* or *synthetic* step in a transcendental argument involves situating a thought, and considering my suggestion that situating a thought means something like ascribing to myself the conceptual content of a thought, we can understand Allison’s claim to mean that showing that the will is autonomous involves ascribing to myself the conceptual content of the thought that morality rests on the principle of autonomy. This act of self-ascription is the *a priori* ground of the thought. Pursuing this suggestion, I hope to show that we can reconstruct Kant’s Deduction of Freedom as a single argument with two main steps, and that these two steps meet Maimon’s two demands: The first step

⁸⁰ See Ameriks (1982), 226.

⁸¹ KrV, 5:31. KrV, 5:47.

⁸² My emphasis. KpV, 5:47.

⁸³ See KrV, Bxxxvi: “Dogmatism is therefore the dogmatic procedure of pure reason, without an antecedent critique of its own capacity . . . criticism is the preparatory activity necessary for the advancement of metaphysics as a well-grounded science.”

⁸⁴ For a helpful discussion of the central claims made in the *Review of Aenesidemus*, see Breazeale (1981). As I mentioned previously, G. E. Schulze’s *Aenesidemus* raises a version of the inference to reality problem. RA, 46; A, 141.

⁸⁵ Allison (1990), 238.

puts forward the claim that “[transcendental] freedom and an unconditional practical law reciprocally imply each other.”⁸⁶ This step is what Allison calls the reciprocity thesis.⁸⁷ It meets Maimon’s demand that philosophy obtain the form of a systematic derivation from a single first principle.⁸⁸ The second step generates in us the feeling of respect for the moral law, and in doing so gives *actuality* or *reality* to the reciprocity thesis. This step meets Maimon’s demand that a philosophical system be actualized in the subject. I will discuss these two steps in turn.

2.1. Step One: The Reciprocity Thesis

As Allison explains, Kant’s argument for the reciprocity thesis comprises four main steps:

- (1) As a “kind of causality” the will must, in some sense, be law governed, or in the language of the second *Critique*, “determinable” according to some law (a lawless will is an absurdity); (2) as free, it cannot be governed by laws of nature; (3) it must therefore be governed by laws of a different sort, namely, self-imposed ones; and (4) the moral law is the required self-imposed law.⁸⁹

Allison expects us to find Kant’s argument problematic for two main reasons. First, it is difficult to defend (4), for even if we grant that a free will must be governed by some law—because a lawless will is an absurdity—and even if we grant that the law of a free will must be self-imposed, “it does not seem at all obvious that the moral law as defined by Kant is the only viable candidate for such a law.”⁹⁰ Instead of attempting to defend (4), as Allison does, I believe that it is sufficient to establish what Kant first says when he formulates the reciprocity thesis, namely, “[transcendental] freedom and *unconditional practical law* reciprocally imply each other.”⁹¹ Or, in the language Kant employs in the next sentence, it is sufficient to establish that “an unconditional law is merely the self-consciousness of pure practical reason, this being identical with the positive concept of freedom.”⁹² It isn’t necessary to establish more than this,

⁸⁶ KpV, 5:29.

⁸⁷ Allison (1990), 201–203.

⁸⁸ The manner in which the moral law serves as the first principle in a systematic derivation of all of reality will become clearer in the next chapter, when I discuss the idea that philosophy as a whole must be built on a practical foundation.

⁸⁹ Allison (1990), 203.

⁹⁰ Allison (1990), 203.

⁹¹ My emphasis. KpV, 5:29.

⁹² KpV, 5:29.

for the self-consciousness of pure practical reason that an unconditional law affords may be called by different names. We may use the moral law to name this self-consciousness, or, for instance, we may use the biblical injunction to love God with all our strength to name the self-consciousness of pure practical reason.⁹³ In chapters 5 and 6, I propose that we understand Schelling's *Ages of the World* fragments of 1811–15 and Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* as two philosophical systems that offer the second of these two possibilities. Because I do not believe that the moral law as defined by Kant is the only law that names the self-consciousness of pure practical reason, I do not believe that we need to defend (4).

Yet Allison expects us to reject Kant's argument for the reciprocity thesis for a second reason. Allison draws attention to the fact that the argument presupposes "the thick concept of a transcendently free rational agent, rather than the thin concept of a rational being or a rational agent *simpliciter*."⁹⁴ In §5 Kant defines transcendental freedom, the conception of freedom that is required for autonomy, as the freedom of a will "for which the mere lawgiving form of a maxim can alone serve as a law." Since the mere form of a law "can be represented only by reason," a transcendently free will is identical with pure practical reason.⁹⁵ Or, as Allison reminds us, a transcendently free agent is "not free merely from *determination* by any *particular* sensuous inclination, drive, or desire (this being the mark of practical freedom), but also free from *determination* by desire or inclination *überhaupt*."⁹⁶ Having defined transcendental freedom, in §6 Kant looks for the law that "is competent" to determine a transcendently free rational agent, and he formulates the reciprocity thesis.⁹⁷ Thus, the argument establishes a transcendental claim in the form of a double conditional: "If I am a transcendently free rational agent, then I am bound by the moral law, and if I am bound

⁹³ Paul Franks suggests this idea in the remark that closes his reading in *All or Nothing* of the *Factum* of reason: "Formulated more generally, the *Factum* of reason is the acknowledgment of the supreme normativity of pure reason in whatever form one takes to be appropriate. If one takes the best expression of pure reason's normativity to be, not Kantian morality, but rather the beauty of nature or, say, the sublimity of divine love, then one will have a different view from Fichte's of the transcendental standpoint that is the precondition for the German idealist program, of the absolute principle with which the system begins, and of the self-consciousness with which it culminates and closes the circle" (Franks [2005a], 335).

⁹⁴ Allison (1990), 213.

⁹⁵ KpV, 5:29–30.

⁹⁶ My emphasis. I emphasize the term "determination" here to point out that, on Kant's view, morality does not require that we deny our inclinations, desires, loves, and cares, but merely that we prevent these from becoming legislative. See KpV, 5:73: "Pure practical reason merely *infringes* upon self-love, inasmuch as it only restricts it, as natural and active in us even prior to the moral law, to the condition of agreement with this law, and then it is called *rational self-love*." Allison (1989), 114.

⁹⁷ KpV, 5:29.

by the moral law, then I am a transcendently free rational agent.” As Allison remarks, though, this is a “Pyrrhic victory” for any critic of Kant’s moral theory, for Kant’s argument stands or falls on whether we are transcendently free, and this is precisely the form of freedom that a naturalist, such as Hume, will deny we possess.⁹⁸

We can see that Kant is now facing the problems that Maimon raises when he asks the question: *quid facti*? Kant is either begging the question against the Humean skeptic or arguing in a circle, and given that Kant is appealing to the reciprocity thesis in order to establish his moral theory, if it is not the case that we are transcendently free, then the entire structure of Kant’s moral theory “remains a castle in the air.”⁹⁹ If we wish to save Kant’s effort to ground moral obligation, then we must find in Kant’s moral theory something that gives *actuality* or *reality* to the concept of transcendental freedom. Only in this manner can we go beyond offering the reciprocity thesis in the form of a hypothetical claim.

2.2. Step Two: Actualizing the Reciprocity Thesis

In chapter 2, I argued that actualizing a philosophical system involves adopting an entire metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical framework, or that it involves adopting a philosopher’s standpoint. It is not my aim here to explain what it would mean to do this, in Kant’s case. Yet I do need to explain what it means to give *actuality* or *reality* to Kant’s concept of transcendental freedom, for this is what is required if we are to discover the ground of moral obligation.

I claimed earlier that the second step in Kant’s Deduction of Freedom generates in us a feeling of respect for the moral law, and that in doing so it demonstrates the validity of the reciprocity thesis, the thesis that Kant formulates in step one. If step one corresponds to the Metaphysical Deduction of the categories in the first *Critique*, step two corresponds to the Transcendental Deduction of the categories.¹⁰⁰ This is because, in step one, Kant derives the moral law from the concept of a transcendently free agent, just as in the Metaphysical Deduction of the first *Critique* he derives the categories from the logical forms of judgment, and because in step two he shows that the moral law *applies to us*, just as in the Transcendental Deduction of the first *Critique* he shows that the categories apply to “everything which can be meaningfully related to experience.”¹⁰¹ On

⁹⁸ Allison (1990), 213.

⁹⁹ Maimon, Strf, IV, 208.

¹⁰⁰ As Paul Franks rightly points out, the deduction of freedom is supplied by the entire Analytic of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, not only by the section of the Analytic entitled “On the deduction of the principles of pure practical reason.” See Franks (2005a), 278.

¹⁰¹ Henrich (1969), 646. Although I am arguing that we can discern in Kant’s Deduction of Freedom two steps that correspond to the Metaphysical and Transcendental Deductions in Kant’s

the Maimonian rereading of the Deduction I offered in chapter 2, seeing that the categories apply to everything which can be meaningfully related to experience involves adopting an entire metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical framework.¹⁰²

I now turn to what we can regard as the *Transcendental* Deduction of Freedom. I will focus on what I consider to be the *synthetic* or *ampliative* moment in the argument. As I said previously, this moment involves ascribing to myself the propositional content of the conditional claim that forms the first premise of the argument. In his remark to §6 Kant introduces an example whose aim is to justify his assertion that the moral law enables us to *cognize* our own faculty of freedom:

Suppose someone asserts of his lustful inclination that, when the desired object and the opportunity are present, it is quite irresistible to him; ask him whether, if a gallows were erected in front of the house where he finds this opportunity and he would be hanged on it immediately after gratifying his lust, he would not then control his inclination. One need not conjecture very long what he would reply. But ask him whether, if his prince demanded, on pain of the same immediate execution, that he give false testimony against an honorable man whom the prince would like to destroy under a plausible pretext, he would consider it possible to overcome his love of life, however great it may be. He would perhaps not venture to assert whether he would do it or not, but he must admit without hesitation that it would be possible for him.¹⁰³

How does this example accomplish its aim? Kant's first question is meant to elicit acknowledgment of our spontaneity or practical freedom, which is freedom in the negative sense. If we answer Kant's first question in the affirmative, we show that we have a limited capacity for self-determination (*Willkür*).¹⁰⁴ Yet what we

first *Critique*, I do not mean to suggest that the two steps in the second *Critique* are separated as clearly as they at least seem to be in the first *Critique*. Here, Kant moves back and forth between exposition and deduction. See KpV, 5:46: "The *exposition* of the supreme principle of practical reason is now finished, that is, it has been shown, first, what it contains, that it stands of itself altogether *a priori* and independently of empirical principles, and then what distinguishes it from all other practical principles. With the *deduction*, that is, the justification of its objective and universal validity . . ."

¹⁰² See chapter 2, 105.

¹⁰³ KpV, 5:30.

¹⁰⁴ See Allison (1990), 207: "In order to understand the significance of the introduction of transcendental freedom, it is important to recall the contrast between mere practical freedom and transcendental freedom analyzed in chapter 3. As was then suggested, the contrast is not to be understood, as it usually is, as between a compatibilist and an incompatibilist conception but rather as between two incompatibilist conceptions of freedom. The former roughly corresponds to the conception of freedom presupposed in the idea of rational agency, as presented in the *Critique of Pure*

are weighing is our “love of life” against our desire for a particular object, so our incentives for self-determination are still being traced back to our sensuous nature. By contrast, in answering Kant’s second question, what we are weighing is our “love of life” against a moral imperative, and our life is the condition for enjoying the satisfaction of *any* desire. If we answer Kant’s second question in the affirmative, then we show that we are capable of acting on a principle that has no foundation in inclinations, empirical interests, or desires. We demonstrate, by our affirmative response to Kant’s question, that we are transcendently free, capable of being determined by pure practical reason (*Wille*). Keeping in mind that, for Kant, cognition always requires both concepts and the application of those concepts to actuality via intuition, we are now prepared to see why he says that we can *cognize* our faculty of freedom.¹⁰⁵ When we start reading the example, what we have at our disposal is the reciprocity thesis and the conceptual content of “transcendental freedom.” If we accept Kant’s invitation to acknowledge that we are capable of determining ourselves on the basis of a principle that has no foundation in our sensuous nature, we also have an instance of an application of the concept of transcendental freedom to actuality, via our *immediate* and *singular* act of self-ascription. Paul Franks clarifies the analogy between theoretical and practical cognition:

In theoretical cognition, the immediate and singular application to actuality is supplied by sensible intuition, which can be pure or empirical. We now find that there can also be practical cognition, in which the immediate and singular application is supplied by the self-expressive or autonomous act of the rational will as such. Thus I can cognize practically that I can will the moral law and am thus subject to it.¹⁰⁶

In reading this passage, it is important to remember what I said earlier concerning Fichte’s use of the term “intuition.”¹⁰⁷ Drawing on Paul Franks’s work

Reason and in the *Groundwork II*, prior to the introduction of the principle of autonomy. As we saw, it involves a genuine, albeit limited spontaneity or capacity for self-determination and therefore a capacity to act on the basis of imperatives, even though the incentives for obeying these imperatives might ultimately be traceable to our sensuous nature. By contrast, transcendental freedom, which is the conception of freedom required for genuine autonomy, involves, in Kant’s terms, a complete independence from everything empirical and hence from nature generally (KpV, 5:97–100).”

¹⁰⁵ See section 1.2, 184. KpV, 5:42: “At the same time [this Analytic] shows that this fact is inseparably connected with, and indeed identical with, consciousness of freedom of the will, whereby the will of a rational being that, as belonging to the sensible world cognizes itself as, like other efficient causes, necessarily subject to laws of causality, yet in the practical is also conscious of its existence as determinable in an intelligible order of things.”

¹⁰⁶ Franks (2005a), 284.

¹⁰⁷ See section 1.2, 184.

on this topic, I said that the form of immediacy that Fichte has in mind when he employs the term “intuition” is of our capacity for *immediate self-ascription*, and I said that Fichte employs this term to convey the idea that our capacity for immediate self-ascription is *actual* or *unconditioned*.¹⁰⁸ Fichte gives us the tools to make sense of Kant’s claim that we can cognize our faculty of freedom: by willing the moral law, I show that the *concept* of transcendental freedom *applies to me*.¹⁰⁹ The *first-personal character* of practical cognition distinguishes it from theoretical cognition, and the performative aspect of Kant’s Deduction of Freedom distinguishes it from standard interpretations of Kant’s other deductions.¹¹⁰ Yet if the first-personal character of practical cognition distinguishes it from theoretical cognition, practical cognition shares with theoretical cognition the mark of universal validity, in the sense that it is available to every human being.¹¹¹ Thus, Kant’s Deduction of Freedom offers us an instance of an argument for a truth—the actuality or reality of transcendental freedom—that is ineliminably subjective, for we can cognize this truth only as the condition in virtue of which we are receptive to moral imperatives. Given that, on Kant’s view, transcendental freedom is identical with pure practical reason, the Deduction of Freedom provides us with a philosophical method for cognizing or becoming conscious of pure reason’s practicality.¹¹² We can now ground moral obligation—the determination of our will—in the activity of reason.

At this point, I want to discuss an objection to the interpretation of Kant’s Deduction of Freedom that I am offering, for a version of this objection is frequently raised in the scholarly literature. Is it the case that if we respond affirmatively to Kant’s second question, we demonstrate that we are capable of acting on a principle that has no foundation in inclinations, empirical interests, or desires? What if someone is willing to give up their life instead of disgracing an honorable man, only because they wish to be viewed as a martyr?¹¹³ In such a case, the incentive to action would still be traced back to the person’s desires

¹⁰⁸ It is important to keep in mind here that, for Kant, immediacy and singularity are the marks of an intuition. See KrV, A32/B48.

¹⁰⁹ Or employing Korsgaard’s language, by willing the moral law, I demonstrate that I value myself under the concept of transcendental freedom.

¹¹⁰ See Franks (2005a), 294: “[Practical] cognition can never become knowledge, because it remains first person singular.” As I argued in chapter 2, Maimon enables a rereading of the argumentative structure of Kant’s first *Critique* which, by revealing the relationship between sensibility, understanding, and reason, also shows that even Kant’s Transcendental Deduction of the categories requires that we perform in a certain manner: it requires that we uphold reason’s demand to bring our concepts into a collective unity. For Maimon, this activity has both ethical and religious significance.

¹¹¹ See Franks (2005a), 297.

¹¹² KpV, 5:30.

¹¹³ See Franks’s formulation of this objection in Franks (2005a), 282.

and inclinations. In order to address this objection, we need to remember that, on Kant's view, the human will is both free and pathologically affected.¹¹⁴ As Stephen Engstrom explains, what Kant means by "pathological affection" is "the kind of affection that constitutes sensible desire, an affection of which we are immediately conscious through feeling."¹¹⁵ By describing pathological affection as a form of *imperfection*, Kant suggests that it is also a form of *perfectibility*, "in the form of a capacity for self-determination, and the will's possession of this form of perfectibility entails that it is not *determined* through being pathologically affected."¹¹⁶ Kant is only trying to bring to consciousness our *capacity* for self-determination, which can be actualized to a greater or lesser degree. It is for this reason that Kant says that the moral principle serves as the principle of a deduction of our *faculty* of freedom.

In "The Idea of Freedom and Moral Cognition in *Groundwork III*," Sergio Tenenbaum gives us conceptual resources and textual evidence to support Engstrom's proposal to consider the concept of transcendental freedom as a form of perfection. In the context of discussing Kant's claim in the third section of the *Groundwork* that we must act "under the idea of freedom," Tenenbaum refers us to the passages in the first *Critique* where Kant relates his use of the word "idea" to Plato's.¹¹⁷ Just as Plato considered ideas to be "archetypes of things themselves," Kant wants us to consider the "transcendental ideas" or concepts of pure reason as *ideals* of a certain kind of perfection.¹¹⁸ Attending to this background, Tenenbaum suggests that Kant's claim in *Groundwork III* that we cannot act otherwise than under the idea of freedom can be understood to mean that we cannot act otherwise than under a certain ideal or standard of perfection:

If we take this understanding of 'idea' as our guide, we can say that 'acting under the Idea of Freedom' means to act under a certain kind of ideal of a certain kind of perfection. The perfection in this case is the unlimited use of reason. . . . If freedom is understood as self-determination, and the relevant limitation here is a susceptibility to sensible incentives, acting under the Idea of freedom is having as an ideal pure self-determination,

¹¹⁴ See KpV, 5:79: "Recognition of the moral law is, however, consciousness of an activity of practical reason from objective grounds, which fails to express its effect in actions only because subjective (pathological) causes hinder it."

¹¹⁵ Engstrom (2010), 95.

¹¹⁶ See KpV, 5:32. Engstrom (2010), 95.

¹¹⁷ See G, 4:448, "Every being that cannot act otherwise than under the idea of freedom is just because of that really free in a practical respect, that is, all laws that are inseparably bound up with freedom hold for him just as if his will had been validly pronounced free also in itself and in theoretical philosophy." See Tenenbaum (2012), 570.

¹¹⁸ KrV, A313–315/B370–372.

the ideal of being determined by practical reason alone without the motivating influence of sensible impulses.¹¹⁹

Below, we will consider whether it is the case that we *cannot* act otherwise than under the ideal of pure self-determination. For the moment, I want to highlight how Tenenbaum's interpretation of Kant's central claim in *Groundwork III* enables us to conceive the concept of transcendental freedom as the "ideal of being determined by [pure] practical reason alone," an ideal that we can uphold for ourselves, but still fail to realize.

Tenenbaum's interpretation also gives readers another way to approach both my claim that Kant's example can be regarded as an *invitation* to acknowledge that we are capable of determining ourselves, and my claim that if we accept the invitation, we ascribe the conceptual content of the concept of transcendental freedom to ourselves: Kant's example can be regarded as an invitation to "have as an ideal pure self-determination."¹²⁰ Yet the invitation requires a response. If I respond affirmatively to Kant's second question, I demonstrate that I accept the invitation to uphold the ideal of pure self-determination as the highest standard or norm for my conduct.¹²¹

We can see that the objection that our affirmative response to Kant's second question doesn't "bootstrap us up to transcendental freedom" arises only if we fail to understand transcendental freedom as a capacity that can be actualized to a greater or lesser degree, or if we fail to construe Kant's argument from the perspective of the first person.¹²² In the last three paragraphs, I clarified the first reason for misunderstanding Kant's argument; let me now clarify the second reason by returning to Korsgaard's idea that we constitute our practical identities

¹¹⁹ Tenenbaum (2012), 571.

¹²⁰ Tenenbaum (2012), 571.

¹²¹ See Franks (2005a), 298: "Having interpreted Kant's Deduction of Freedom in a way suggested but not developed by Fichte—not as appeal to a fact of consciousness that avoids skeptical issues, but rather as the solicitation of a first person singular, pure act or *Tathandlung* that manifests itself sensibly and that enables a response to skepticism—I now turn to the implications of this deductive strategy for the German idealist project." On the Maimonian interpretation of the Transcendental Deduction that I offered in chapter 2, the force of the Deduction depends on whether we uphold the idea or ideal of arriving at a fully determined logical space; and it depends on whether we understand that demand as the human desire for union with the divine intellect and explain that desire as the human *telos*, or perfection. See chapter 2, 98.

¹²² Herman (1989), 135. Herman raises this objection to Henry Allison's interpretation of the performative aspect of the Deduction of Freedom. On Allison's view, the performance involves submitting oneself to the moral law. See Allison (1989), 120: "To submit oneself to the moral law is to 'perform' in a certain manner. Moreover, since in the very act of submitting to it I take it as valid for me, I cannot coherently doubt that I am subject to it; nor can I doubt what follows immediately from being subject to it: namely, that I have both an incentive to do what the law requires and the capacity to do it."

by valuing ourselves under certain descriptions, and by assuming responsibility for the values that we endorse in doing so. We saw that, on Korsgaard's view, this includes *valuing ourselves as rational beings*: "We owe it to ourselves, to our own humanity, to find some roles that we can fill with integrity and dedication. But in acknowledging that, we commit ourselves to the value of our humanity just as such."¹²³ The suggestion is that we can refrain from committing ourselves to the value of our own humanity. If so, then by asking us if we would be able to control our lustful inclinations on pain of execution, Kant is summoning us to value our humanity or rationality. Yet by asking us if we would consider it possible to overcome our love of life in order not to give false testimony against an honorable man, Kant is summoning us to do more than this: he is summoning us to make the value that we place on our humanity or rationality the highest standard or norm for our conduct. If we accept this interpretation of what Kant is doing when he asks us these two questions, then the moral law, which demands that we give our maxims the form of a universal law, doesn't just express a fact of reason.¹²⁴ It also expresses an act of reason: it expresses our commitment to the value of our humanity or rationality. Employing the language Fichte uses in his *Review of Aenesidemus*, the moral law "does not have to express a fact just as content [*eine Tatsache*, actual fact]; it can also express a fact as performance [*eine Tathandlung*, actual deed]."¹²⁵ This Fichtean interpretation of the function of Kant's two questions brings out the performative and first-personal aspect of the Deduction of Freedom.

Yet this interpretation also raises an important question for the Kantian view that we *cannot* act otherwise than under the ideal of pure self-determination. Korsgaard explains the rationale for this Kantian view when she comments, "in order to be a person—that is, to have reasons—you must constitute yourself as a particular person. . . . In order to do that, you must commit yourself to your value as a person-in-general, that is, as a rational agent."¹²⁶ In other words, if I am to attain my humanity or personality, I *cannot* act otherwise than under the ideal of pure self-determination; I *must* act under the idea or ideal of transcendental freedom. Yet I can fail to attain my humanity; I can even *deny* my humanity.¹²⁷

¹²³ Korsgaard (2009), 24–25.

¹²⁴ KpV, 5:31: "So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle in a giving of a universal law."

¹²⁵ RA, 46; A, 141.

¹²⁶ Korsgaard (2009), 24–25.

¹²⁷ In *The Claim of Reason*, Stanley Cavell suggests that skepticism masks the denial of our own humanity. See Cavell (1999), 492: "Is the cover of skepticism—the conversion of metaphysical finitude into intellectual lack—a denial of the human or an expression of it? For of course there are those for whom the denial of the human is the human."

Paul Franks conveys an idea like this in his own interpretation of the *Factum* of reason:

For human freedom is the freedom either to be autonomous or to be heteronomous. Of course, heteronomy does not present itself as heteronomy, let alone as irrationality. It presents itself as a seductive rationality that expresses my empirical self. As soon as I see that I have a choice between heteronomy and autonomy . . . the choice is, as they say, a no-brainer.¹²⁸

What Franks is characterizing as the freedom either to be autonomous or to be heteronomous is what I am characterizing as the freedom to acknowledge or deny my humanity.

We must concede, though, that this is no longer a standard Kantian view on the nature of freedom. In the introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant explicitly rejects the idea that freedom consists in the *ability* to determine one-self against one's lawgiving reason—the capacity for evil.¹²⁹ In chapter 5 we will see that in order to *ground* or explain the possibility of evil, in his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, Schelling found it necessary to reconceive the nature of human freedom and moral agency. For the moment, we can focus on the Fichtean idea that the moral law expresses an actual deed: it expresses our commitment to the value of our own humanity or rationality. If I am receptive to moral imperatives, then I give *actuality* or *reality* to the concept of transcendental freedom, for the concept of transcendental freedom just is the concept of pure self-determination, and my receptivity to moral imperatives demonstrates that I uphold for myself the idea or ideal of pure self-determination. Once again, Kant's argument for the reciprocity thesis is irreducibly first-personal, but it is available to all human beings.

2.3. Moral Feeling and Self-Affection

If we remain unconvinced that this interpretation of Kant's argument for the reciprocity thesis displays the ground of moral obligation, Kant's discussion of moral feeling and the incentives or *Triebfeder* of pure practical reason is meant to bring us over to his side. To show why this is so, I want to explain the importance of two claims that Kant makes in this section of the *Analytic* of the second *Critique*: First, Kant claims that moral feeling is a feeling “produced solely by reason.”¹³⁰ Second, he claims that duty “is nothing other than personality.”¹³¹

¹²⁸ Franks (2005a), 334.

¹²⁹ MS, 6:226.

¹³⁰ KpV, 5:76.

¹³¹ KpV, 5:76, 5:87.

I will explain the significance of these two claims primarily by drawing on the work of Stephen Engstrom and Sanford Budick.

Kant's first claim is meant to show that moral obligation has its *ground* in the mind's self-affection; it is meant to show that pure reason is practical, capable of determining our will. More specifically, Kant's first claim is meant to show that moral obligation has its ground in the mind's *representation* of the moral law, which as we saw earlier, Kant identifies with the "self-consciousness of pure practical reason."¹³² On Kant's view, the mind's representation of the moral law has two effects on feeling.

First, pure practical reason merely "infringes upon self-love," turning it into what Kant calls "rational self-love." On Kant's view, self-love is "a predominant benevolence toward oneself."¹³³ Or as Engstrom clarifies the idea, *self-love* is "a liability of the will in a pathologically determinable subject to assert, to maintain as valid, certain claims reflecting self-directed concern, a liability that consists in the will's being naturally pathologically affected by the pathologically determinable self, or by the subject's lower faculty of desire, to which all its inclinations belong."¹³⁴ Kantian morality does not require that we deny our inclinations, desires, loves, and cares. It only requires that we "restrict" the claims that reflect concern for ourselves—claims that are "naturally active in us"—to the condition of agreement with the demands of the moral law.¹³⁵ Kant acknowledges that doing this involves pain, for some of our desires won't be consistent with the demands of morality. Why, then, would any of us uphold morality's demands?

Kant maintains that the mind's representation of the moral law has a second effect on feeling, an effect that clarifies the incentive of morality. Pure practical reason "strikes down" or "humiliates" *self-conceit*, and in doing so it shows that the moral law is "an object of respect."¹³⁶ On Kant's view, self-conceit is what self-love becomes when it "makes itself lawgiving and the unconditional practical principle."¹³⁷ By characterizing self-conceit in active terms (self-conceit *makes itself* lawgiving), and by employing some of the same terms that he employs when he characterizes the moral law (self-conceit makes itself the *unconditional practical principle*), Kant invites us to regard self-conceit as an active competitor against the moral law. On Kant's view, self-conceit is the presumption to turn self-love into the absolute or unconditioned practical principle. As Engstrom claims, "The description of self-conceit in terms of legislation and the unconditional practical

¹³² KpV, 5:29.

¹³³ KpV, 5:73.

¹³⁴ Engstrom (2010), 102.

¹³⁵ KpV, 5:73.

¹³⁶ KpV, 5:73.

¹³⁷ KpV, 5:73, 5:74.

principle seems to imply that it presupposes consciousness of the moral law.”¹³⁸ If this is so, then it is easier to see why the mind’s representation of the moral law humiliates self-conceit: by representing the moral law, the mind compares self-conceit to pure practical reason. If we feel belittled, this must be because we have *already acknowledged* the supreme normativity of pure reason. Thus, the mind’s representation of the moral law serves as a corrective, bringing into focus our proper object of respect. Returning to my closing remarks in section 1, we can see that feeling respect for the moral law expresses the manner in which we have already determined ourselves. Or, employing Fichte’s language, by feeling respect for the moral law, we posit ourselves *as* self-positing and take up the standpoint of freedom.

I now turn to Kant’s claim that duty, the necessitation of an action from respect for the law, “is nothing other than personality.”¹³⁹ In *Kant and Milton*, Sanford Budick illuminates Kant’s conception of freedom and his discussion of moral feeling by bringing Kant’s moral theory into contact with Milton’s poetry of the sublime. What I want to distill from Budick’s study is his suggestion that “the activity of representing sublime tragic form is central to the *Critique of Practical Reason*,” and his suggestion that this form of representation “constitutes the pure self-determination that is the ground of personality.”¹⁴⁰ As I did in the previous section, Budick pays attention to Kant’s use of moral examples in order to bring to consciousness our capacity for *self*-determination, understanding this as our capacity for being determined by pure practical reason. What Budick means in the passage cited previously by “the representation of sublime tragic form,” is the “*a priori* representation of the *honest person in extremis*.”¹⁴¹ This representation is *a priori* in the sense that, for Kant, “telling the story of the honest person *in extremis* is itself an *a priori* activity of moral reason.”¹⁴² Storytelling is an *activity* of moral reason, because it generates moral feeling and produces a “rationally necessitated will-determination.”¹⁴³ The example or story that Budick has in mind is the one that Kant provides toward the end of chapter III in the *Analytic of the Critique of Practical Reason*: an upright man endures a form of distress that could have been avoided by disregarding duty, but is sustained by the consciousness that he has maintained humanity in its proper dignity in his own person.¹⁴⁴ By representing to ourselves the inner tranquility of this person,

¹³⁸ Engstrom (2010), 104.

¹³⁹ KpV, 5:87.

¹⁴⁰ Budick (2010), 165–166.

¹⁴¹ Budick (2010), 172.

¹⁴² Budick (2010), 179.

¹⁴³ Franks (2005a), 290.

¹⁴⁴ KpV, 5:88.

a tranquility that is the effect of “respect for something quite different from life, something in comparison and contrast with which life with all its agreeableness has no worth at all,” we “discover the sublimity of our own supersensible existence” and set before our eyes our nature in its “higher vocation.”¹⁴⁵ Given that Kant defines personality as “freedom and independence from the mechanism of the whole of nature, regarded nevertheless as also a capacity of a being subject to special laws—namely pure practical laws given by his own reason,” we can see that the higher vocation of which Kant is speaking is the achievement of our own personhood.¹⁴⁶ If this is so, then Kant has provided us with an incentive for morality, since moral action—the determination of our will in accordance with laws given by our own reason—is the means by which we attain personality.¹⁴⁷ When I act out of respect for the moral law, I demonstrate that I have understood what being a person involves. In the Deduction of Freedom, Kant is inviting us to recognize that understanding what it means to attain personhood is the *actual ground* of moral obligation.

Conclusion

Let me bring this chapter to a close by rephrasing the main points that I argued. By providing a Fichtean interpretation of Kant's Deduction of Freedom through the fact of reason, I hope I clarified what distinguishes the method of transcendental argumentation from other methods of philosophical argumentation. On a Fichtean interpretation of the Deduction of Freedom, the fact of moral obligation is traced back to a moment in which we accept an invitation or summons to enter into a self-relation and adopt the perspective or standpoint of freedom. By representing moral exemplars, Kant invites us to generate in ourselves the feeling of respect for the moral law. If we feel respect for the moral law, this fact expresses the manner in which we have determined our freedom. Moreover, this form of self-affection is what constitutes personality. Once we have been brought to this form of self-awareness, we have discovered the ground of necessitation: it is in virtue of the self's relationship with itself that the presuppositional relations revealed by a transcendental argument are necessary. When we discover the self as the ground of necessitation, we posit ourselves *as* self-positing. In this chapter, I focused on explaining what positing ourselves *as* self-positing means

¹⁴⁵ KpV, 5:88–89.

¹⁴⁶ KpV, 5:87.

¹⁴⁷ See Korsgaard (1996), 169: “Recall that all of this is supposed to solve the problem of moral interest. Kant thinks of the idea of our intelligible existence as being, roughly speaking, the motivating thought of morality, and so what makes morality possible.”

in connection with the moral life. In the next chapter, I broaden the scope of the discussion in order to explain the relevance of this idea for philosophy as a whole. What does Fichte mean when he says in his 1796–99 *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* lectures that “[e]very act of representing is an act of self-positing. Everything begins with the I”?¹⁴⁸ And can we use this thought to clarify the idea that a German Idealist system is a “philosophy of postulates” that begins with a primordial construction whose first product is our self?¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ WLnM, 346; FTP, 114.

¹⁴⁹ See Schelling, AEIW; TEISK.

The Unconditioned in Human Knowledge

A Theoretical Puzzle or a Practical Demand?

Philosophy is not yet at an end. Kant has provided the results. The premises are still missing. And who can understand results without premises?

—F. W. J. Schelling

But what is the basis of the system of those representations accompanied by a feeling of necessity, and what is the basis of this feeling of necessity itself? . . . Another name for the system of representations accompanied by a feeling of necessity is “experience”—whether inner or outer. We thus could express the task of philosophy in different words as follows: Philosophy has to display the basis or foundation of all experience.

—J. G. Fichte

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I argued that on a Fichtean interpretation of Kant’s Deduction of Freedom through the fact of reason, a form of self-relation that Fichte calls self-positing is shown to be the ground of moral obligation. Focusing on Kant’s two thought experiments, I interpreted the *Factum* as a moment in which I posit myself as a particular person by upholding for myself an ideal that I regard as the highest standard or norm for my conduct; if we accept Kant’s invitation, that ideal is the ideal of autonomy or rational self-determination.

This chapter builds on the previous one by explaining the Fichtean view that this act of self-positing is not only the ground of moral obligation, but also the ground of all constraint or necessitation, both in the theoretical and practical domains. This means that reason as a whole is built on a practical foundation, because upholding an ideal that I regard as the highest standard or norm for my conduct is something that nobody can coerce me to do; it is an action that

is possible only through freedom. Also, as I explained in the previous chapter, the act of self-positing involves ensuring that the space of reasons that each of us inhabits (the network of existential, predicative, and inferential commitments that forms the fabric of our world) forms a whole that is consistent, complete, and warranted, and this is something we *do*. This is the view Fichte is leading us toward in the passage from his first introduction to *An Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* (1797) that serves as the second epigraph to this chapter. By clarifying the view that self-positing is the ground of all constraint or necessitation, this chapter also shows that Fichte's notion of the self-positing or absolute subject is designed to address Jacobi's complaint that all philosophy, including Kant's critical philosophy, tends to undermine itself, and so fails to provide human reason with a firm place to stand.

Yet we will see that Fichte's notion of the absolute subject is not the only notion that can provide human reason with a firm foundation: Spinoza's notion of God or nature as the "absolute substance" meets this purpose, too.¹ For this reason, the methodological questions I considered in chapter 3 become relevant once again. Building on the interpretation of Kant's Deduction of Freedom I provided in the previous chapter, I will discuss two different interpretations of the view that the German Idealist system is a "philosophy of postulates" that begins with a primordial construction whose first product is our self, and I will explain how Fichte and Schelling employ this method of postulation to provide two different ways of meeting reason's demand for unconditioned explanation, and thereby two different ways of solving the conflict of reason.

1. Echoes of Jacobi in Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics

Let me start by reformulating in a manner that is conversant with contemporary debates in metaphysics Jacobi's complaint that philosophy leads to nihilism. Doing so will help elucidate both Jacobi's own arguments and the contemporary relevance of the problems he posed for philosophy. In chapter 1, we saw that on Jacobi's view, if we commit ourselves without reservation to the principle of sufficient reason, we must also commit ourselves to a monistic ontology. But we saw, too, that on Jacobi's view, a monistic ontology annihilates the possibility of there being any individual entities: consistent commitment to the principle of sufficient reason leads to monism, but monism leads to nihilism.

¹ See Spinoza (2000), part I, proposition 14.

A version of Jacobi's problem has reemerged at the center of contemporary debates in metaphysics, and the problem is accompanied by the sorts of questions that the German Idealists asked, in light of the problem, about the promise of Kant's critical philosophy: Have we found an adequate method to reform metaphysics? If we haven't, how can we continue to believe that what we are doing when we are philosophizing is using *reason* to formulate theories about the basic nature of the world? Should we give up on the traditional task of metaphysics? Should we reconceive the task of philosophy as the construction of general theories about the nature of the world that accommodate our basic intuitions and commonsensical views?²

In this section, I discuss Michael Della Rocca's essay "Rationalism, Idealism, Monism, and Beyond," in an effort to show that it echoes Jacobi's main arguments in *Concerning the Doctrine of Spinoza in Letters to Herr Moses Mendelssohn*.³ Both thinkers start by asking us to commit ourselves to the principle of sufficient reason and see where that commitment leads us; both thinkers show—Jacobi in a tone of despair, Della Rocca in a tone of philosophical iconoclasm—that the commitment to explain everything undermines the conditions that enable us to explain anything at all.

Della Rocca's argument for monism is based on a Bradleyan argument of Leibnizian pedigree:

Stripped to its barest bones, the argument is this: the PSR [principle of sufficient reason] dictates that for each thing, there must be an explanation. Thus if two things, x and y , stand in a relation, there must be some thing or things that explain that relation, some thing or things in which that relation is grounded. So, if the relation exists or is real, there must be at least one thing in which that relation is grounded.⁴

The only step in the argument missing from this paragraph is the step that establishes that all relations are grounded in a single entity, the cosmos or universe as a whole. Thus, what appear to us as external relations between distinct things are in fact internal relations or states of the universe, and the universe is the only thing that actually exists. As Della Rocca notes, this form of monism, existence monism, differs from a less radical form of monism, priority monism, "which holds that, while there is only one fundamental object, i.e., the cosmos or reality itself, things other than the one fundamental object may exist as

² See the contributions to Sider, Hawthorne, and Zimmerman (2008).

³ I thank Michael Della Rocca for inviting me to participate in his seminar on monism at Yale University during the spring of 2012, while I was a Visiting Assistant in Research. Della Rocca (2012).

⁴ Della Rocca (2012), 18. For Bradley's argument, see Bradley (1916), 21.

dependent on the one fundamental object.”⁵ Let’s consider each step in the argument.

First, if we commit ourselves to the principle of sufficient reason, we commit ourselves to the view that for each thing that exists, there is an explanation for its existence (or nonexistence).⁶ As Della Rocca points out, to explain something is to represent it “as such and such,” in terms of some of its features or in contrast with other things. Or, to explain a thing is to render it intelligible. If we keep in mind the Latin roots of the word “intelligible”—*inter legere*—we can see that we render something intelligible by “reading between” or “getting between a thing and its properties, in order to enable the property to shed light on the thing.”⁷ What this shows, is that explanation is inherently relational.

This leads us to the second step: “If two things, x and y , stand in a relation, there must be some thing or things that explain that relation, some thing or things in which that relation is grounded.” For instance, let’s consider a lump of sugar and one of its properties: sweetness.⁸ If the relation between sugar and sweetness exists or is real, there must be something that grounds the relation. We cannot ground the relation exclusively in one or the other of the two *relata*, because doing so would be arbitrary: there is no good reason to ground the relation exclusively in one term, rather than the other, since both terms compose the relationship.⁹ Might the relationship be grounded in both terms together, or might it be grounded partly in one, and partly in the other? Can’t we claim that “the relation between x and y is grounded in their standing in a certain relation”?¹⁰ We can, of course, but then we are giving a circular explanation, for what we want to explain is precisely *the fact that x and y “stand in a certain relation.”* Or,

⁵ Della Rocca (2012), 16. See Schaffer (2010), 31–76.

⁶ Spinoza (2000), part I, proposition 11: “To each thing there must be ascribed a cause or reason both for its existence and for its non-existence.” For a powerful argument for the PSR based on our acceptance of explicability arguments, see Della Rocca (2010).

⁷ Della Rocca (2012), 8.

⁸ See Bradley (1916), 20–22.

⁹ See Della Rocca (2012), 18: “In general, because grounding the relation in one of x or y exclusively would be arbitrary, the relation cannot be grounded in x or y exclusively. This step obviously proceeds via the PSR.” Although I provide a charitable reading of Della Rocca’s argument, I am not fully convinced by this step. If we consider, for instance, Maimon’s principle of determinability, it seems clear that the *relation* between the concepts in the position of the subject and predicate of a judgment formed in accordance with the principle of determinability is primarily grounded in the subject of the judgment. While the subject of the judgment can be thought in itself, the predicate of the judgment can only be thought in relation to the subject. I believe that Della Rocca would argue that the relation between the subject and predicate of a judgment formed in accordance with the principle of determinability is not grounded *exclusively* in the subject, since the predicate also determines the subject.

¹⁰ Della Rocca (2012), 19.

in claiming this, we become involved in an infinite regress of explanations since now we have to explain the fact that x and y coexist or stand together in a certain relation, and so on.¹¹

If we can't explain the relationship between two terms by grounding the relationship in one or the other of the terms exclusively, nor by grounding the relationship in both terms together, it seems like we are forced to conclude that the relation does not really exist or is not actually real, since we haven't found the explanatory ground for the relationship, and the principle of sufficient reason requires that we find an explanation for everything that exists. This argument applies both to the relationship between a thing and its properties, or to the relationship between a substance and its modes, and to the relationship between two different things or substances.¹² Yet if we are still committed to the view that everything that exists must have an explanation, our reason won't rest here. We must explain the *appearance* of two different things or substances that are related, and the *appearance* of the relationship between different substances and their modes, or the *appearance* of the relationship between different things and their properties. Perhaps we can explain this in Spinozistic fashion, by arguing that only one substance—God or nature—exists, and by claiming that everything else is a mode of this one substance: the appearance of the existence of a multiplicity of finite things that are really distinct is illusory.¹³ It seems that reason's demand for explanation can find satisfaction here: consistent commitment to the principle of sufficient reason leads to existence monism.¹⁴

¹¹ For Bradley's version of the infinite regress argument, see Bradley (1916), 21: "But let us attempt another exit from this bewildering circle. Let us abstain from making the relation an attribute of the related, and let us make it more or less independent. 'There is a relation C, in which A and B stand; and it appears with both of them.' But here again we have made no progress. The relation C has been admitted different from A and B, and no longer is predicated of them. Something, however, seems to be said of this relation C, and said, again, of A and B. And this something is not to be the ascription of one to the other. If so, it would appear to be another relation, D, in which C, on one side, and, on the other side, A and B, stand. But such a makeshift leads at once to the infinite process. The new relation D can be predicated in no way of C, or of A and B; and hence we must have recourse to a fresh relation, E, which comes between D and whatever we had before. But this must lead to another, F; and so on, indefinitely."

¹² As Della Rocca points out, on the basis of this argument Leibniz denies the reality of relations *between substances* but not the reality of relations *between a substance and its modes*. Bradley does reject the substance-mode distinction. See Della Rocca (2012), 19.

¹³ See Spinoza (2000), part I, proposition 14. On Descartes's view, two terms are really distinct if and only if each can exist independently of the other. See Descartes (1983), section 60. On Leibniz's view, two terms are really distinct if and only if each is intelligible independently of the other. See Leibniz (1991), section 8. See also Suárez (1947).

¹⁴ Della Rocca concedes that it is not uncontroversial to claim that Spinoza is committed to existence monism, rather than to priority monism. Yet if we keep in mind that Della Rocca's interpretation of Spinoza is informed by the view that Spinoza's system is built around his commitment to the principle of sufficient reason, I believe that we can see why Della Rocca believes that Spinoza would reject

Yet Della Rocca rightly hesitates. He says that we have only arrived at “something like existence monism,” and he claims that if we wish to be consistent with our rationalist commitments, we must move “beyond monism” to a metaphysical position that once again fails to satisfy reason’s demand for explanation.¹⁵ Why?

It is at this point that we start to hear echoes of an old, but still relevant, philosophical debate. If we keep in mind that the principle of sufficient reason demands the intelligibility of each thing that exists, and if we keep in mind that to render something intelligible is to read or get between a thing and its properties, in order to let the properties shed light on the thing, can we render the single substance that “exists” intelligible? Della Rocca argues that we cannot.¹⁶ This is because if finite modes are not real, if there is no real multiplicity or diversity, then there can be no genuine distinction between the one substance and its properties (or modes).¹⁷ But then we have no way of “getting between the thing and its properties”; we have no way of explaining “*as such-and-such*” the single thing that we want to say exists.¹⁸ Wasn’t this Jacobi’s lesson? Didn’t he try to show that the principle of sufficient reason “led inexorably to an All that was One and therefore Nothing”?¹⁹

priority monism: if we are committed to the principle of sufficient reason, we must find something to explain the relation of dependence between the one fundamental substance and its finite modes. Like Jacobi, Della Rocca wants to show that the soul or spirit of Spinoza’s philosophy is his commitment to the principle of sufficient reason. See Della Rocca (2008), 11–12.

¹⁵ Della Rocca (2012), 20, 22.

¹⁶ Della Rocca (2012), 8. Because my aim in this section is to highlight the similarities between Della Rocca’s and Jacobi’s claim that commitment to the principle of sufficient reason leads to monism and then to nihilism, I won’t pause to consider Della Rocca’s important proposal to endorse a corollary of the PSR—“things exist to the extent that those things are intelligible”—which enables us to entertain the idea that things come in degrees of reality and intelligibility. See Della Rocca (2012), 20. As we will see in chapter 5, Schelling, too, develops the view that things can possess different degrees of reality. See Beiser (2002), 568: “According to this theory, there cannot be any qualitative differences between things in the absolute, that is differences where one thing opposes another or can be posited without the other. There can be, however, quantitative differences, that is, differences where two things are posited together and are inseparable from one another, but where one is given more reality than the other. This concept therefore implies that there can be differences in degree but not in kind.”

¹⁷ If we argued that Spinoza is committed to priority monism, rather than to existence monism, we could say that there is at least a modal distinction between the one fundamental substance and its properties or states; yet, we have seen why consistent commitment to the principle of sufficient reason leads to existence monism: if there is a relation of dependence between the one fundamental substance and its modes, we have to find something that explains this relationship. On the definition of a modal distinction, see Descartes (1983), section 61.

¹⁸ Della Rocca (2012), 22.

¹⁹ Franks (2000), 98.

In closing this section, I want to remind readers we are at this impasse because of the difficulty in finding a genuine explanatory ground for relations: the difficulty consists in the fact that when we try to provide an explanation, we end up giving circular explanations, or we become involved in an infinite regress of explanations. My aim in the next section is to show that Fichte's notion of the self-positing subject is designed to solve this problem.

2. If Our Knowledge Is to Have Any Foundation

In many of his writings, including the *Review of Aenesidemus* (1794), the *Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre* (1797–98), and the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* lectures (1796–99), Fichte says that a general regress argument led to his conception of the subject that posits itself, of which we are aware pre-reflectively, and which we know by means of an intellectual intuition.²⁰ For instance, in the *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* lectures, Fichte says that all previous philosophers, including Kant, have reasoned as follows:

I am conscious of some object, B. But I cannot be conscious of this object without also being conscious of myself, for B is not I and I am not B. But I can be conscious of myself only insofar as I am conscious of consciousness. Therefore, I must be conscious of this act of consciousness; i.e., I must be conscious of this consciousness of consciousness. How do I become conscious of this? This series has no end, and therefore consciousness cannot be explained in this manner.²¹

We will consider the details of Fichte's argument soon. Straightaway, though, we should note that Fichte is interested in explaining consciousness in general. As Frederick Neuhouser points out, this includes cognitive, volitional, and affective states of consciousness.²² Or, using the phenomenological language that I employed in my reading of the Transcendental Deduction in chapter 2, Fichte is interested in discovering the condition that makes intelligible all representations with intentional content.²³ The passage cited previously expresses Fichte's dissatisfaction with the manner in which all previous philosophers have attempted

²⁰ See Klotz (2002), especially chapter 2.

²¹ WLnm, IV, 3:346; FTP, 112–113.

²² See Neuhouser (1990), 70. Neuhouser makes this point to correct the view—motivated by Dieter Henrich's interpretation of Fichte's theory of subjectivity—that Fichte's primary concern is to explain the possibility of self-consciousness. See Henrich (1982).

²³ Cf. Martin (1997), 15: "In particular the Jena *Wissenschaftslehre* is intended to provide a theory of what I shall call the objectivity or referential character of consciousness."

to do this: all previous attempts to explain consciousness have resulted in an infinite series of conditions for the possibility of consciousness, and so fail to explain the phenomenon.

Fichte's thoughts on this problem go back to the *Review of Aenesidemus*, where in response to G. E. Schulze's criticism of Reinhold's *Philosophy of the Elements* (*Elementarphilosophie*), Fichte considers whether the concept of representation (*Vorstellung*), expressed in Reinhold's *Principle of Consciousness*—"in consciousness, representation is distinguished by the subject from subject and object, and is referred to both"—can serve as the highest concept from which all a priori knowledge can be systematically derived.²⁴ Yet as Paul Franks points out, interpreters have so far overlooked the "methodological implications of [Reinhold's] *Principle's* inadequacies, implications that largely determine the kinds of transcendental arguments German idealists see themselves as needing to develop."²⁵ The problem brought into focus for Fichte by his encounter with Reinhold's philosophy is not just, as Neuhouser suggests, that we must "provide an account of the self-awareness involved in representational consciousness that avoids the infinite regress into which any account based on Reinhold's model inevitably falls," but more importantly, that this form of self-awareness cannot be established as a necessary condition of consciousness *purely by logical entailment or deductive inference*.²⁶ Thus, if Fichte wishes to establish by means of transcendental arguments that the self-positing subject is presupposed in all acts of consciousness, his arguments will require what, in chapter 3, I called a synthetic or ampliative move: a move that calls for the reader's adoption of the philosophical system or standpoint that Fichte is offering.

In this section, we will focus on Fichte's solution to the problem that he sees in all previous attempts to explain consciousness; in section 3, we will consider Fichte's approach to the methodological problem that came into focus for him by his encounter with Reinhold's *Philosophy of the Elements*.

²⁴ While Frederick Beiser and Frederick Neuhouser, among others, provide helpful accounts of the philosophical significance of Schulze's criticisms of Reinhold, Paul Franks focuses on the methodological implications of these criticisms, implications that shape the post-Kantian German Idealist's views on the nature of transcendental arguments. See Neuhouser (1990), 68–116; Beiser (1987), 266–285; Franks (2005a), 211–237. BBMP, 113: "Im Bewußtsein wird die Vorstellung durch das Subjekt vom Subjekt und Objekt unterschieden und auf beide bezogen." In chapter 2, I claimed that Fichte adopts this conception of the task of philosophy from Maimon, rather than from Reinhold, and I clarified his reasons for doing so by considering Maimon's criticism of Kant's *Transcendental Deduction of the categories* in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

²⁵ Franks (2005a), 219.

²⁶ Neuhouser (1990), 72.

The passage from the *Nova Methodo* lectures that I cited earlier centers on one aspect of the general structure of consciousness as described in Reinhold's Principle—namely, the subject's act of distinguishing itself from and relating to its own representations.²⁷ If we start from the idea that whenever we are conscious of an object, we are also in some sense conscious of ourselves—for instance, in being conscious of the glass of water in front of me, I am also in some sense conscious of myself, since the glass is something that *I* can pick up, and something from which *I* can drink—Fichte wants to show that the structure of our self-awareness cannot have the general structure of consciousness, at least as this structure is characterized in Reinhold's Principle of Consciousness.²⁸ This is because, if my self-awareness had the general structure of consciousness, I would have to *represent* this self-awareness to myself; I would have to be “conscious of this act of consciousness.” But then I would once again have to be behind my act of representing myself, and if I try to characterize my self-awareness in relation to my act of representing myself, and believe that this must have the structure of consciousness, I must represent myself, and be behind myself, and so on. Or as Fichte explains the problem: “consciousness has always been treated as a state of mind, i.e., as an object, for which, in turn, another subject is always required.”²⁹ Fichte's notion of the self-positing subject is meant to solve this problem, because it names a form or structure of self-awareness that is not conditioned by the general form or structure of consciousness. The main difference, as Fichte sees it, is that the self-positing subject is *at once subject and object*, “without any mediation at all.”³⁰

This last claim helps us understand why Fichte calls this form of self-awareness pure or “intellectual intuition.”³¹ As we saw in chapter 2, the idea of an infinite

²⁷ My claim is not that the passage from the *Nova Methodo* lectures explicitly refers to Reinhold, but merely that it focuses on one aspect of consciousness that Reinhold's Principle describes.

²⁸ See Franks (2005a), 305: “An act or state is conscious, in Fichte's sense, if it is accessible to the rational agency and the deliberation of the agent performing that act or in that state if I am to employ any representational content in my rational deliberation and agency, that content must be capable of being immediately ascribed to me. For example, if I am to make use of the perceived fact that an obstacle is obstructing my path of motion, then it is insufficient that I be in an informational state representing the fact. I must also be able to access that information and to relate it to my actual motion and to my desire to reach a certain destination.” See also Fichte, VDWL, 217; ANPW, 46–47: “To be sure, anyone can be shown, within his own acknowledged experience, that this intellectual intuition is present in every moment of his consciousness. I cannot take a single step, I cannot move my hand or foot, without the intellectual intuition of my self-consciousness in these actions. It is only through such an intuition that I know that *I* do this. Only in this way am I able to distinguish my own acting (and, within this acting, my own self) from the encountered object of this acting. Every person who ascribes an activity to himself appeals to this intuition.”

²⁹ WLnM, IV, 3:346; FTP, 113.

³⁰ WLnM, IV, 3:347; FTP, 114.

³¹ WLnM, IV, 3:347; FTP, 115.

or intuitive intellect that creates all objects in the act of knowing them and so is one with them, is the idea of an intellect that is *at once* the intellectual subject, intellectual object, and intellectual activity.³² The concept of *representation* has no place in intellectual intuition, so Fichte can use intellectual intuition as the perfect example of a form or structure of self-awareness that is an alternative to the general structure of consciousness expressed in Reinhold's Principle. Yet I want to show that what Fichte finds promising in the notion of an intuitive intellect is not only the idea that it is an unmediated form of self-awareness, but also the idea that the intuitive intellect *creates* its objects in the act of knowing them.

In what sense does the self-positing subject create its objects in the act of knowing them?³³ Fichte gives us some ideas that will help answer this question in the following passage: "The I . . . is not already a substance in advance of this act of self-positing; instead, its very essence is to posit itself as self-positing."³⁴ Here, Fichte conveys the idea that, in the act of positing itself, the subject is creating or bringing *itself* into being. Yet how does the subject create or bring itself into being? On Fichte's view, the subject brings itself into being by "constructing [for itself] the concept of a goal," and by then striving to enact its goals in a natural world.³⁵ The subject determines its self; it gives itself and the world that surrounds it a determinate form, by forming and enacting its values. Our bodies and the surrounding world embody the values and ideals that we uphold. In the *Foundations of the Entire Wissenschaftslehre* (1794–95), Fichte calls this striving or pure activity of the self *the demand of practical reason*, formulating his own version of Kant's categorical imperative: "This demand, that everything should conform to the self, that all reality should be posited absolutely through the self, is the demand of what is called—and with justice—practical reason."³⁶

³² See chapter 2, 99. In the first *Critique*, Kant also characterizes pure or original intuition as "one through which the existence of the object of intuition is itself given," KrV, B72. See also Neuhouser (1990), 77: "In the first place, 'intellectual intuition' is often used to denote a kind of cognition in which the subject's intuiting activity is, in some sense, indistinguishable from the object of intuition. One historically significant version of this conception is the notion of a divine intuition that, in knowing its objects, creates them. Of course, Fichte's doctrine of intellectual intuition should not be understood as attributing to the human intellect the power of creating its objects of knowledge; what it borrows from this theological conception, rather, is the general notion of a species of awareness in which the distinction that is normally made between the intuiter and that which is intuited does not apply, a state of affairs that Fichte wants to ascribe, in some form, to the subject's self-positing."

³³ Below, we will see why attending to this aspect of the idea of an intuitive intellect helps us understand why Fichte and Schelling use the term "postulate" not only with reference to its use in Kant's moral theory, but also with reference to its use in geometry. See section 3, 181.

³⁴ WLn, IV, 3:346; FTP, 114.

³⁵ VDWL, 217; ANPW, 47.

³⁶ GW, 399; FSK, 232. See also GW, 396; FSK, 230: "Kant's *categorical imperative*. If it is clear anywhere that Kant founded his critical enterprise, albeit tacitly, on the very *premises* that the *Science of Knowledge* lays down, it is apparent here. How could he ever have arrived at a categorical imperative,

Yet the passage I just cited also indicates that the striving or pure activity of the self cannot be *cognized* or *known* immediately. In the language of the 1794–95 *Wissenschaftslehre*, “the absolute self is related absolutely to a not-self.”³⁷ Although we may in some sense be aware of the pure or absolute self, we only become conscious of the self or subject that posits itself in a state of diremption, when we can distinguish the activity of the self from the objects toward which it is directed; the striving of the self can only be known in relation to its objects. It is for this reason that, in the second introduction to *An Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte says that the intellectual intuition by means of which the philosopher first posits himself is always conjoined with some sensory intuition:

In addition, intellectual intuition is always conjoined with some sensory intuition. I cannot discover myself to be acting without also discovering some object upon which I act; and I discover this object by means of sensory intuition, which I grasp *by means of a concept*. Moreover, I cannot discover myself to be acting unless I also construct an image or a picture of what it is I want to produce [by acting], which image I also grasp *by means of a concept*. For how do I know what it is I want to produce? How could I possibly know this unless I had immediately observed myself engaged in the act of constructing a concept of a goal, that is, in a type of acting? . . . I become conscious only of the concepts involved, that is, the concept of the object and the concept of the goal, not however of the two intuitions that lie at the basis of these concepts.³⁸

Let me paraphrase this passage in a manner that shows more clearly how Fichte’s notion of the self-positing subject or absolute self solves the problem raised in the previous section: the problem of finding a genuine explanatory ground for relations. In this passage, Fichte is saying that consciousness always involves two concepts: the concept of the object on which I act, and the concept of *my* goal or activity.³⁹ These two concepts are a species of representation that the subject distinguishes both from itself and from the object, and which it relates to both.

as an absolute postulate of conformity with the pure self, unless by presupposing an absolute being of the self, whereby everything is posited, and so far as it is not, at least *ought* to be?”

³⁷ GW, 397; FSK, 230.

³⁸ My emphasis. VDWL, 217; ANPW, 46–47.

³⁹ For a contemporary formulation of a similar idea, see Engstrom (2009), 47: “In other words, the determination of an end in an act of choice is the specification of a practical conception of an *effect* to be produced, a conception that already contains the practical conception of the relation of causal dependence in which the object, the effect, is to stand to oneself, the subject and agent, and this latter conception is just the practical conception of the *action* whereby that object is to be produced.”

Yet Fichte is also saying that these two concepts, the two terms that are related in any act of consciousness, have at their basis two intuitions, or two aspects of a single act of intellectual intuition: “intellectual intuition is the immediate consciousness that I act and of what I do when I act”; this act of intellectual intuition is the act “by means of which the ‘I’ first originates” for the person engaged in philosophical reflection.⁴⁰ The subject’s self-positing activity is thus what grounds the two terms that are related in the act of consciousness: the concept of a goal or type of acting, and the concept of an object of action.⁴¹ Taking this idea further, we can see that Fichte is trying to show that the two terms that are related in any act of consciousness—the subject and object of consciousness—are, in fact, two aspects of a single underlying activity, the activity of self-positing, which in chapter 3 I characterized as the act of upholding for myself an ideal of perfection or a conception of freedom that I regard as the highest standard or norm for my conduct.⁴² As I noted at the beginning of this chapter, the act of self-positing also involves ensuring that the space of reasons that each of us inhabits (the network of existential, predicative, and inferential commitments that forms the fabric of our world) forms a whole that is consistent, complete, and warranted.

In the 1794–95 version of the *Wissenschaftslehre* and in the 1796–99 (*Wissenschaftslehre*) *Nova Methodo* lectures, this idea enables Fichte to reconceive the traditional distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy by upholding the view that *reason, as a whole, is practical*. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Kant had already formulated the thesis of the “primacy of pure practical reason in its connection with speculative reason.”⁴³ Yet, on Kant’s view, this thesis concerns how we should conceive the relationship between the *interest* of reason in its speculative use, and the *interest* of reason in its practical use. If the interest of reason in its speculative use “consists in the cognition of the object up to the highest *a priori* principles,” and if the interest of reason in its practical use “consists in the determination of the will with respect to the final and complete end,” when these two interests come into conflict, we should give primacy to the interest of reason in its practical use, since on Kant’s view “all interest is

⁴⁰ VDWL, 217; ANPW, 46.

⁴¹ See Redding (1999), 96: “This idea is of course just another way of expressing the idea that the I’s self-positing or self-consciousness is always ‘mediated’ by some object of consciousness, a counterposited ‘not-self’ . . . It is this idea of mediation that Fichte retains of Reinhold’s representationalism. The contents of consciousness are always conceptualized or ‘represented’ objects—both as the known objects of theoretical reason and those ‘objects’ (objectives or intended outcomes) at which our voluntary actions aim in practical reason. And as my self-positing or intellectual intuition is always through these counterposits, it is therefore never immediate, nor absolute, as self-identity logically must be.”

⁴² See chapter 3, 139–141.

⁴³ KpV, S:120.

ultimately practical.”⁴⁴ Thus, when certain theoretical propositions—we are free; God exists; we have an immortal soul—that are “withdrawn from any possible insight of speculative reason” are shown to be inseparably connected to the principles of practical reason, speculative reason must accept such propositions “as something offered to it from another source.”⁴⁵ Such propositions are *postulates of practical reason*, which Kant defines as theoretical propositions that are not demonstrable as such (i.e., as theoretical propositions) but only “insofar as [they are] attached inseparably to an *a priori* unconditionally valid practical law.”⁴⁶ Insofar as we understand the manner in which such theoretical propositions are inseparably connected to the interests of reason in its practical use, our affirmation of them can be called a “pure rational belief.”⁴⁷

On Fichte’s view, the thesis of the primacy of practical reason means something different than what it means in the second *Critique*. It no longer names a method for solving a conflict between the interest of reason in its speculative use and the interest of reason in its practical use. Instead, it names the more radical claim that all representations with intentional content, or all conscious states, including cognitive, volitional, and affective states, are in some sense grounded in the practical. Fichte conveys this idea in many different ways throughout the Jena period, from 1794 to 1799. For example, in part III of the 1794–95 *Foundations of the entire Wissenschaftslehre*, he says:

The injunctions issued now and then to the philosophers, to prove that reason was practical, were therefore fully justified. . . . This can be achieved not otherwise than by showing that reason cannot even be theoretical, if it is not practical; that there can be no intelligence in man, if he does not possess a practical capacity; *the possibility of all presentation is founded on the latter*. And this proof has now just been effected, in showing that, without a striving, no object at all is possible.⁴⁸

I believe that introducing a brief parenthesis to discuss a section from Heidegger’s *Being and Time* will elucidate what Fichte means when he says that the possibility of all presentation is founded on our practical capacity. In §43 of *Being and Time*, titled “Da-sein, Worldliness, and Reality,” Heidegger writes: “reality is referred back to the phenomenon of care,” and he understands care as the call of conscience, which “summons Da-sein to its ownmost potentiality-of-being.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ KpV, 5:120–122.

⁴⁵ KpV, 5:121.

⁴⁶ KpV, 5:122.

⁴⁷ KpV, 5:126.

⁴⁸ My emphasis. GW, 399; FSK, 233.

⁴⁹ Heidegger (1996), 196, 292.

When he makes this claim, Heidegger foresees that we will ask whether what he means is that there would be nothing without Da-sein, the being distinguished by the fact that it cares or is concerned about its own being. He answers thus:

However, only as long as Da-sein is, that is, as long as there is the ontic possibility of an understanding of being, “is there” [*gibt es*] being. If Da-sein does not exist, then there ‘is’ no ‘independence’ either, nor “is” there an “in itself.” Such matters are then neither comprehensible nor incomprehensible. Innerworldly beings, too, can neither be discovered, nor can they lie in concealment. Then it can neither be said that beings are, nor that they are not. Now, as long as there is an understanding of being and thus an understanding of objective presence, we can say that then beings will still continue to be.⁵⁰

Heidegger is pointing out that there are two standpoints from which we can ask the question whether there are things independent of Da-sein.⁵¹ Now, from the standpoint of Da-sein’s existence, if we ask whether beings will continue to be, we can answer in the affirmative.⁵² Yet *then*, from the standpoint of Da-sein’s non-existence, if we asked if beings are or are not, the question would be senseless or unanswerable; we could neither say that there are entities, nor that there are not entities.⁵³ The question would be like asking, “What time is it on the sun?”⁵⁴ Before answering the question, we should summon our question itself to critical examination and ask if a framework is in place that makes the attempt to answer the question intelligible.⁵⁵ Similarly, I believe that we should understand Fichte’s

⁵⁰ Heidegger (1996), 196.

⁵¹ See Blattner (2005), 238.

⁵² See Blattner (2005), 238: “The idea seems to be this: if we now ask ourselves, Will the sun continue to exist, even if Dasein dies out? the answer we give is ‘yes.’ Why? Because we understand the sun as something occurrent, and occurrentness is independent of human practices.”

⁵³ See Blattner (2005), 242–243. Blattner argues that the standpoint of Da-sein’s existence is the framework that makes the question whether there are things independent of Da-sein intelligible.

⁵⁴ See Wittgenstein (2009), §350.

⁵⁵ See KrV, A485/B513: “We would gladly refrain from demanding to see our questions answered dogmatically if we comprehended right from the start that however the answer might come out, it would only increase our ignorance, removing one inconceivability only to replace it with another, taking us out of one obscurity only to plunge us into a still greater one, and perhaps even into contradictions. If our question is put merely in terms of affirmation or negation, then it is prudent to handle it by initially leaving aside the supposed grounds for each side and first taking into account what one would gain if the answer turned out on one side or the opposite side. Now if it so happened that the result in both cases was something quite empty of sense (nonsense), then we would have good grounds to summon our question itself to be critically examined and to see whether it does not itself rest on a groundless presupposition and play with an idea that better betrays its falsity in its application and consequences than in its abstract representation.”

claim that the possibility of all presentation is founded on our practical capacity to mean that everything that is real for us is so insofar as it is related to a fundamental project of selfhood, not that nothing exists except for the self.⁵⁶ In part I of the 1794–95 version of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte expresses this idea in different terms: “But we can point out something from which every category is itself derived: the self, as absolute subject. Of every other possible thing to which it may be applied, it has to be shown that reality is transferred to it *from the self*.”⁵⁷ The claim in the second sentence is not that nothing exists outside of or except for the self, but that the self transfers reality to or makes manifest everything that exists.⁵⁸ What would an open flower be without an appreciative gaze, or what is it to the person whose eyes are turned inward, as the narrator of Rilke’s Eighth Elegy laments?

In his second presentation of *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte makes it easier for us to understand how he is reconceiving the traditional distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy. This distinction, Fichte now claims, is an abstract version of a distinction between action that is merely felt or intuited, and action that is comprehended, by means of a concept: “What ‘acting’ is is something that can only be intuited; such knowledge cannot be developed from concepts nor can it be communicated thereby.”⁵⁹ Yet we comprehend and are able to communicate our sense of our own inner activity by means of concepts of the objects that we wish to produce, or by means of concepts of the goals that we wish to bring about. Thus, Fichte observes, a concept is “inner activity, grasped in its state of repose.”⁶⁰ Paul Franks further clarifies how Fichte’s view that concepts are “activity in a state of repose” enables us to

⁵⁶ In his 2011 Munich lectures, Robert Brandom makes a similar claim in connection with Hegel’s conception of the intentional relation in the introduction to the *Phenomenology*. See Brandom (2011), Lecture 2, 17: “That is, the claim is that there is a kind of sense-dependence of modal vocabulary on what is expressed by normative vocabulary, not a kind of reference-dependence.” Yet I have been arguing that if we remain within the standpoint of the first person, it is difficult to sustain this distinction between the sense-dependence and reference-dependence of modal vocabulary on what is expressed by normative vocabulary.

⁵⁷ GW, 262; FSK, 100.

⁵⁸ As we will see in section 4, this interpretation of Fichte’s claim means that he must uphold a form of priority monism, rather than existence monism.

⁵⁹ VDWL, 216; ANPW, 44–45. Compare with Kant’s distinction between judgments of perception and judgments of experience in Prol, 4:298: “Empirical judgments, insofar as they have objective validity, are judgments of experience; those, however, that are only subjectively valid I call mere judgments of perception. The latter do not require a pure concept of the understanding, but only the logical connection of perceptions in a thinking subject. But the former always demand, in addition to the representations of sensory intuition, special concepts originally generated in the understanding, which are precisely what make the judgment of experience objectively valid.”

⁶⁰ VDWL 280; ANPW, 118.

understand anew the traditional distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy:

In his second presentation [of the *Wissenschaftslehre*], [Fichte] dispenses with the traditional distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy. This means not only that he begins with the practical . . . but also that he “inserts the practical into the theoretical.” . . . The distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy is an abstract, reflective version of an important distinction between *ideal* and *real* activity. Real activity is “true activity which is an instance of acting,” whereas ideal activity is “activity in a state of repose,” “an image or copy” of the object to which real activity directs itself. . . . On the one hand, there can be no ideal activity without real activity and no real activity without ideal activity. . . . On the other hand, ideal activity is the ground of real activity. This reflects Fichte’s commitment to Holistic Monism: real activity is the first principle, which grounds ideal activity, but real activity is an immanent, not a transcendent principle, and could not exist without its derivatives.⁶¹

In other words: real activity corresponds to all that has traditionally fallen within the domain of practical philosophy, and ideal activity corresponds to all that has traditionally fallen within the domain of theoretical philosophy. On Fichte’s view, there is no real distinction between these two forms of activity, since we cannot understand real activity without ideal activity, nor can we understand ideal activity without real activity. Yet even if there is no real distinction between these two forms of activity, real activity is more basic, in the sense

⁶¹ My emphasis. Franks (2005a), 317. See WLNm, IV, 2:44: “Der Unterschied zwischen der REALEN und idealen Thätigkeit besteht darinn; die IDEALE ist ein im Objekt fixiertes—gebundenes Anschauen, ein verlieren oder verschwinden im Objekte, ein unmittelbares Bewußtseynin RUHE.

REALE Thätigkeit ist in AGILITÄT, ein Übergehen zum Handeln, und enthält den Grund ihres so bestimmt seyns in sich selbst; sie ist also nicht FIXIRT sond.

Es ist keine REALE Thätigkeit, (als Thätigkeit des ICHS) ohne IDEALE; denn ohne IDEALE ist das sich selbst setzen des Ich nicht möglich, und das sich selbst setzen ist ja das ICH—also ware ohne sie auch Ich nicht.

So ist umgekehrt keine IDEALE ohne REALE Thätigkeit des Ich. Durch die REALE wird das Ich sich wieder OBJEKT, es ware also ohne REALE Thätigkeit keine Thätigkeit des Ich als OBJEKT. IDEALE Thätigkeit ist das PRODUKT des praktischen Vermögens.” Given that Franks clarifies Fichte’s claim by pointing out that real activity is the “first principle,” I believe that in this sentence he means to say that real activity is the ground of ideal activity. Beiser seems to reverse Fichte’s conception of the relationship between ideal and real activities. See Beiser (2002), 494: “If ideal activity is that by which the ego acts on its world, and if real activity is that by which the world acts on the ego, then the *Wissenschaftslehre* explains real activity by ideal activity.”

that it grounds ideal activity. Likewise, practical and theoretical philosophy can be regarded as two aspects of a single science of reason grounded on a first principle, the self-positing subject or “the absolute I.”

We can now see how Fichte’s notion of the self-positing subject provides an explanatory ground for the relation between subject and object that characterizes all states of consciousness, and we can see why, on Fichte’s view, it is the concept of the I, rather than the concept of representation, that serves as the highest concept from which all other knowledge can be systematically derived.⁶² This concludes Fichte’s argument for monism. In section 4, we will consider whether Fichte’s system arrives at an explanatory ground for all relations in a manner that does not result in nihilism; only if it does, does Fichte succeed in addressing Jacobi’s complaint. Yet, in the following section, I return to Fichte’s approach to the methodological problem that was brought into focus for him by his encounter with Reinhold’s *Philosophy of the Elements*. I mentioned earlier that Fichte’s encounter with Reinhold made it clear to him that the first principle of a philosophical system could not be established purely by logical entailment or deductive inference; his arguments would require what in chapter 3 I called a synthetic or ampliative move, a move that demands the reader’s adoption of a philosophical standpoint.⁶³

3. An Inverted Spinozism? Philosophy Must Begin with a Postulate

If we look back to Jacobi’s and Della Rocca’s arguments for monism, we will immediately notice an important difference from Fichte’s argument: while Fichte upholds the view that all finite relations are grounded in the “absolute I,” Jacobi and Della Rocca uphold the Spinozistic view that all finite relations are grounded in the single “absolute substance,” God or nature.⁶⁴ For this reason, Jacobi says in his 1799 open letter to Fichte that he first “found entry into the *Doctrine of Science* through the representation of an inverted Spinozism.”⁶⁵ In the 1794–95 version of the *Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte had already contrasted his own system,

⁶² See section 2, 154.

⁶³ See section 2, 154.

⁶⁴ To be more precise, Jacobi and Della Rocca hold that relations cannot be grounded in the absolute substance, for if there is no real multiplicity or diversity, there is no way of making intelligible the single substance that exists. This is why Della Rocca argues that we must move “beyond monism.” See Della Rocca (2012), 20, 22.

⁶⁵ See JaF, 195; JtF, 502: “I first found entry into the *Doctrine of Science* through the representation of an inverted Spinozism.”

the critical system, with an opposite system, the dogmatist system, whose most consistent expression is the philosophy of Spinoza:

Now the essence of the critical philosophy consists in this, that an absolute self is postulated as wholly unconditioned and incapable of determination by any higher thing. . . . Any philosophy is, on the other hand, dogmatic, when it equates or opposes anything to the self as such; and this it does in appealing to the supposedly higher concept of the thing (ens), which is thus quite arbitrarily set up as the absolutely highest conception. . . . So far as dogmatism can be consistent, Spinozism is its most logical outcome.⁶⁶

The idea that criticism and dogmatism represent two irrefutable and theoretically indemonstrable philosophical systems is the central theme of Schelling's 1795 "Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism" and of Fichte's first introduction to *An Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*. In what follows, I discuss the methodological implications of this idea by building on the Fichtean interpretation of the Deduction of Freedom that I provided in chapter 3 and by developing my suggestion that if an argument for a philosophical system convinces us, then its first premise expresses the manner in which we have determined our freedom. Doing so will also help us understand the view that philosophy as a whole should have the form of a system of ideas or practical postulates.

Fichte and Schelling convey this view on numerous occasions, for example, when they say that the first principle of their system has the status of a postulate.⁶⁷ Yet the view is expressed most emphatically in "The Earliest System-Program of German Idealism," a two-page fragment that Franz Rosenzweig rediscovered in 1914 at the Prussian State Library in Berlin, while conducting research on

⁶⁶ GW, 279–280; FSK, 117.

⁶⁷ WLn, IV, 3:344–345; FTP, 110: "The first principle is a postulate. Just as geometrical instruction begins with the postulate that one describe space, so too must the reader or student of philosophy begin by doing something. Anyone who understands the first proposition is put into the proper frame of mind for philosophy." See also PBDK, 68; PLDC, 168: "You are quite right, my friend, if you state historically that the majority of critical philosophers find the transition from dogmatism to criticism so easy. In order to make the transition quite easy and comfortable, they regard the method of practical postulates as a method belonging exclusively to criticism, and they believe that they have adequately distinguished this system from any other by the mere term practical postulates. This implies the additional advantage that one does not find it necessary to fathom more deeply the peculiar spirit of practical postulates within the system of criticism which is deemed to be sufficiently distinguished by the method as such. *As if the method were not precisely what even conflicting systems can have in common, and what two systems would have to have in common if they absolutely contradicted each other!*" Benjamin Crowe's and Daniel Breazeale's discussion of "philosophical fictions" in Fichte's *Jena Wissenschaftslehre* help clarify Fichte's view that the first principle of his system has the status of a postulate. See Crowe (2008) and Breazeale (2002).

his dissertation on Hegel's concept of the state. The fragment, which has been attributed to Schelling, Hegel, and Hölderlin, starts with the following claim:

... an Ethics. Since the whole of metaphysics falls for the future within *moral theory*—of which Kant with his pair of practical postulates has given only one *example*, and not *exhausted* it, this ethics will be nothing less than a complete system of all ideas or of all practical postulates (which is the same thing). The first idea is, of course, the presentation of myself as an absolutely free entity. Along with the free, self-conscious essence, there stands forth—out of nothing—an entire world, the one true and thinkable creation out of nothing.⁶⁸

I want to explain the philosophical significance of four interrelated ideas that I believe are expressed in this passage. First: by stating that the whole of metaphysics falls for the future within moral theory, the passage expresses the view that philosophy as a whole must be built on a practical foundation. Second: Kant's "system of ideas" or practical postulates provides only one example for a reformed metaphysics. Third: the first idea is the presentation, or representation, of myself as a free being, or the first idea is a specific conception of my own freedom. Fourth: This act of representing or forming a concept of freedom is the only genuine limit to the principle of sufficient reason.

When the author of the fragment says that metaphysics falls for the future within moral theory, I don't believe that he means that we can explain the basic structure of the world by starting from a specific view on the nature of moral action, but by starting from a specific conception of freedom that is then expressed in a moral principle.⁶⁹ This means that philosophy is built on a practical foundation, because upholding a specific conception of freedom is something that no one can coerce me to do; it is an action possible only through freedom.

This idea is interwoven with the fourth one: the idea that the only thing that resists explanation is the act of representing our freedom. For this reason, in the *Nova Methodo* lectures, Fichte calls the act of self-positing the ultimate ground or foundation of human knowledge:

The I simply posits itself. . . . In other words, that the I posits itself within immediate consciousness as a subject-object is itself something that

⁶⁸ OSP, 110. For a helpful discussion of the interpretation and reception of the text, see Frank-Peter Hansen (1989). See also the contributions by Otto Pöggeler and Dieter Henrich in Christoph Jamme and Helmut Schneider (1984). Benjamin Pollock discusses Rosenzweig's 1917 essay on the fragment in Pollock (2010).

⁶⁹ Thus, unlike Karl Ameriks, who holds that the practical foundation of Fichte's system is irreducibly moral, I believe that we should understand the starting point of Fichte's and Schelling's systems as our conception of human freedom. See Ameriks (2000), 193.

occurs immediately, and no reasoning can go beyond this. Reasons can be provided for all the other specific determinations that occur within consciousness, but no reason can be given for immediate consciousness. Immediate consciousness is itself the ultimate reason or foundation upon which everything else is based and to which everything else must be traced back, if our knowledge is to have any foundation.⁷⁰

While reading this passage, we should remember that the form of immediacy that Fichte has in mind is of our capacity for *immediate self-ascription*; as I have been arguing, what we ascribe to ourselves is a specific conception of freedom.⁷¹ If we keep this in mind, we will see that here Fichte is also conveying the view that ascribing to ourselves a conception of freedom is something *unconditioned*, something for which we can provide no further reason or explanation.

In order to better understand the idea that philosophy as a whole must be built on a practical foundation, let's consider what it would mean to "construct" or "create" a world that turned around the categorical imperative, the moral principle that expresses commitment to the concept of transcendental freedom, understood as autonomy or rational self-determination.⁷² Although explaining this in detail is beyond the scope of this chapter, I can at least provide an example of how one might do this by turning briefly to Fichte's *Foundations of Natural Right* (1797), where Fichte exhibits the necessary characteristics of a world inhabited by rational beings whose existence consists in volition. In the first theorem, Fichte asserts that the "practical I is the I of original self-consciousness; that a rational being perceives itself immediately only in willing, and would not perceive itself and thus would also not perceive the world . . . if it were not a practical being. Willing is the genuine and essential character of reason."⁷³ If the life of a rational being consists in volition or action that is governed by self-imposed laws, Fichte wants to demonstrate that the world such a being inhabits must have certain "general and unchanging characteristics."⁷⁴ What are some of these characteristics? Fichte shows, for instance, that if acting is freely determining oneself to affect the world in a particular way, the objects in the sensible world must be such that they set limits to our freedom; if the I is infinitely determinable, "the object, because it is an object, is determined all at once and forever. The I is what it is in *acting*, the object in *being*."⁷⁵ Thus, our world must be a world of distinct and definite objects, a world of particular things that are located in

⁷⁰ WLnm, IV, 3:347; FTP, 114.

⁷¹ See chapter 3.

⁷² WLnm, IV, 3:344; FTP, 109.

⁷³ GNR, 332; FNR, 21.

⁷⁴ GNR, 338; FNR, 27.

⁷⁵ GNR, 332; FNR, 27.

space. Yet if we are beings who determine ourselves to affect the world through our actions, the objects in our world must also be such that they can be affected by our actions. Thus, the objects in the sensible world must in turn resist and cede to our effects, and we must in turn affect and be affected by the objects in the world; time, Fichte wants to show, comes into being for us as the oscillation between these two moments. At one moment in time the objects in the sensible world resist our influence, at the next moment in time our influence persists along with these objects. While bare matter is originally given to us and remains the same, through our activity and in time we alter the *form* of the things that surround us, and the things that surround us in turn alter our own form. In this manner, Fichte derives the forms of sensibility—space and time—from the concept of volition. Had we more space, we could demonstrate how Fichte attempts to derive all of reality from self-legislation, the activity that distinguishes us as rational beings. For the moment, I only want to point out that Fichte is pursuing what, in chapter 2, I called Maimon's methodological innovation: like Maimon, Fichte is deriving the forms of sensibility from a single first principle. In Fichte's case, the principle is his version of the categorical imperative: "Everything is to be posited in the self; the self is to be absolutely independent, whereas everything is to be dependent upon it. Hence, what is required is the conformity of the object with the self."⁷⁶

The second and third ideas that are expressed in the passage from "The Earliest System-Program of German Idealism" that I cited earlier must be discussed together. Kant's system of ideas or practical postulates provides only one example for a reformed metaphysics *because* the first idea is a specific conception of my own freedom. In chapter 3, drawing on Sergio Tenenbaum's work, I proposed that we understand Kant's claim in *Groundwork III* that we must act "under the idea of freedom" to mean that we must act under the idea or ideal of a certain kind of perfection, the "ideal of being determined by practical reason alone without the motivating influence of sensible impulses."⁷⁷ Yet can we uphold a different ideal of perfection? Fichte and Schelling argue that we can. Moreover, they contend that these different ideals are precisely what constitute the main difference between criticism and dogmatism, or between idealism and realism.

In the "Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism," Schelling writes, "the central task of all philosophy consists of solving the problem of the existence

⁷⁶ GW, 396; FSK, 230. Fichte refers to Maimon when he claims in the 1794–95 *Foundations of the Wissenschaftslehre* that every category is derived from the self. See GW, 261–262; FSK, 100.

⁷⁷ See Kant, G, 4:448: "Every being that cannot act otherwise than under the idea of freedom is just because of that really free in a practical respect, that is, all laws that are inseparably bound up with freedom hold for him just as if his will had been validly pronounced free also in itself and in theoretical philosophy." Tenenbaum (2012), 571.

of the world.”⁷⁸ The problem of the existence of the world is the central concern of philosophy, since the existence of the world brings about the “opposition between subject and object” that conditions all states of consciousness.⁷⁹ Because theoretical reason necessarily seeks the unconditioned, and because it cannot answer the question concerning the existence of the world by relying on its own resources, “philosophy proceeds to the realm of demands,” to the domain of practical philosophy. Philosophy now “demands the act through which the [unconditioned] *ought* to be realized”; it demands that there be no opposition between subject and object.⁸⁰ This demand can be met in one of two ways: “either no subject and an absolute object, or no object and an absolute subject.”⁸¹ The first way corresponds to *realism*, and the second to *idealism*, but both systems are “intent upon the dissolution of that contrast between subject and object, upon absolute identity.”⁸² On Schelling’s view, one becomes convinced by one system or the other only by the attempt to realize either one or the other in oneself.⁸³

In the first introduction to *An Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte seems to adopt Schelling’s way of characterizing the distinction between idealism and realism, or criticism and dogmatism, that is, in metaphysical terms, rather than in methodological terms, as Kant conceived the distinction.⁸⁴ As is the case with Schelling, these two systems name two different ways of arriving at the unconditioned, yet in Fichte’s case this means something different. As we saw earlier, in Fichte’s case, the unconditioned is conceived as the explanatory ground of experience. Thus, idealism conceives “the intellect in itself” as the explanatory ground of experience, and dogmatism conceives “the

⁷⁸ PBDK, 82, 77–78; PLDC, 177, 173–174: “You can understand quite clearly how small an accomplishment that was to [Spinoza]; he was troubled by another riddle, the riddle of the world, the question of how the absolute could come out of itself and oppose to itself a world?”

⁷⁹ PBDK, 64; PLDC, 166.

⁸⁰ Earlier, we saw that in the 1794–95 *Foundations of the Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte formulates the demand of practical reason in similar terms.

⁸¹ PBDK, 65; PLDC, 167. By an “absolute object,” Schelling seems to mean an absolute substance, in Spinoza’s sense.

⁸² PBDK, 100; PLDC, 188. PBDK, 97; PLDC, 186.

⁸³ PBDK, 73–74; PLDC, 172.

⁸⁴ In the two introductions to *An Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte primarily distinguishes “idealism” from “dogmatism.” As we will see below, in the “Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism” Schelling characterizes the distinction between idealism and realism in *metaphysical* terms, but he also sometimes—in the fifth and ninth letters—characterizes the distinction between criticism and dogmatism in *methodological* terms. Daniel Breazeale argues that Fichte adopts the metaphysical way of characterizing the distinction between dogmatism and criticism from Salomon Maimon. See Breazeale (1994), xxiii. For Maimon’s characterization of this distinction, see chapter 2. See KrV, Bxxxvi: “Dogmatism is therefore the dogmatic procedure of pure reason, without an antecedent critique of its own capacity. . . . Criticism is the preparatory activity necessary for the advancement of metaphysics as a well-grounded science.”

thing in itself” as the explanatory ground of experience.⁸⁵ Nonetheless, idealism and dogmatism still name two different ways of *representing our freedom*. Fichte suggests this view when he comments: “The dispute between the idealist and the dogmatist is actually a dispute over whether the self-sufficiency of the I should be sacrificed to that of the thing, or conversely, whether the self-sufficiency of the thing should be sacrificed to that of the I.”⁸⁶ As we saw in chapter 1, the choice between idealism and dogmatism depends, according to Fichte, “on the kind of person one is,” for even if the choice is determined by *inclination* and *interest*, Fichte believes that “one’s supreme interest and the foundation of all one’s other interests is one’s *interest in oneself*.”⁸⁷ On Fichte’s view, if we have been properly educated and if our character hasn’t been slackened by scholarly self-indulgence and vanity, we will choose idealism. By contrast, in the “Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism,” Schelling starts to develop the idea that idealism and realism, or criticism and dogmatism, have equal practical validity, since both are attempts to realize the unconditioned by eliminating the opposition between subject and object, the opposition that is endemic to human experience. If Schelling chooses idealism over realism, this seems more like a gesture of loyalty to Fichte than a principled decision.⁸⁸

In chapters 5 and 6, we will consider the reasons that led Schelling and Rosenzweig to conceive anew the nature of human freedom, in a manner that makes a form of realism the most consistent philosophical system or standpoint. For the moment, I want to point out that although in the “Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism” Schelling primarily characterizes the distinction between idealism and realism, or criticism and dogmatism, in *metaphysical* terms, he also sometimes characterizes the distinction between criticism and dogmatism in *methodological* terms. For example, in the ninth letter, he says:

Criticism itself necessarily turns into dogmatism as soon as it sets up the ultimate goal as realized (in an object), or as realizable (at any particular time). The absolute, if represented as realized (as existing), becomes objective; it becomes an object of *knowledge* and therewith ceases to

⁸⁵ VDWL, 188; ANPW, 11.

⁸⁶ VDWL, 193; ANPW, 17.

⁸⁷ VDWL, 195; ANPW, 20. VDWL, 194; ANPW, 18. In chapter 1, I explained Kant’s conception of a rational belief that is determined by an interest or need of reason in its practical use.

⁸⁸ See Beiser (2002), 476: “The *Briefe* foreshadow Schelling’s later system of absolute idealism to a remarkable degree. More than five years before the *Darstellung meines Systems*, Schelling states one of its central and characteristic doctrines: that idealism and realism, or criticism and dogmatism, are both equivalent from the standpoint of the absolute. These systems are essentially identical, Schelling explains, since both attempt to describe the pure subject-object identity of the absolute. While criticism makes the subject absolute and demands that the object disappear, dogmatism makes the object absolute and demands that the subject vanish.”

be an object of *freedom*. And nothing is left for the finite subject but to annihilate itself as subject in order to become identical, through such self-annihilation, with that object.⁸⁹

The idea that Schelling is conveying here is that if the ultimate goal of both criticism and dogmatism, or idealism and realism, is the dissolution of the contrast between subject and object that characterizes human consciousness, dogmatism differs from criticism in that it conceives this goal as realized in an object, or as realizable at a particular time.⁹⁰ Yet if this goal were realized, the subject would annihilate itself *as subject*, for the contrast between subject and object is also the condition of human consciousness. Moreover, when Schelling says that if the absolute is represented as realized, it becomes an object of *knowledge* and ceases to be an object of *freedom*, he clarifies for us the significance of his claim in the Fifth Letter that the *Critique of Pure Reason* provides a canon for all forms of philosophizing, insofar as it provides a “universal methodology” for all.⁹¹ The *Critique of Pure Reason* provides a universal methodology for all forms of philosophy because it considers its postulates—freedom, God’s existence, and the immortality of the soul—as objects of freedom, not as objects of knowledge. It considers them to have the status of practical postulates. Keeping in mind Kant’s definition of a postulate, we can understand Schelling to mean that the principle he is now placing at the start of philosophy, the identity of the subject and object in the absolute, is one whose validity cannot be demonstrated.⁹² Or employing the terms I used in chapter 3, the truth of the proposition cannot be established purely by logical entailment; there must be a synthetic or ampliative move, a move that requires that we make a commitment. In this case, the commitment is to a specific conception of our own freedom.

The idea that the first principle of a philosophical system expresses a commitment to a specific conception of our own freedom also helps us understand a second interpretation of the view that the German Idealist system is a “philosophy of postulates.” As Franks observes, “on the first interpretation, the term postulate is understood with reference to its use in Kant’s moral philosophy. On the second, it is understood with reference to its use in geometry.”⁹³ Thus

⁸⁹ PBDK, 101–102; PLDC, 189.

⁹⁰ We should keep in mind here that, on Hegel’s view, what the Christian doctrine of the incarnation of God means in philosophical terms, is the view that freedom is realized in the ethical realm, and specifically in the ideal state. See LPR, 481–489.

⁹¹ PBDK, 68; PLDC, 168.

⁹² Kant defines a postulate of practical reason as a theoretical proposition that is not demonstrable as such—i.e., as a theoretical proposition—but only “insofar as [it is] attached inseparably to an *a priori* unconditionally valid practical law,” KpV, 5:122.

⁹³ Franks (2005a), 350.

far, I have offered an interpretation of the view that philosophy should have the form of a system of practical postulates by understanding Fichte's and Schelling's use of the term "postulate" with reference to its use in Kant's moral philosophy. Yet in Fichte's *Nova Methodo* lectures and in Schelling's "On Postulates in Philosophy," the appendix to his 1797 *Treatise Explicatory of the Idealism in the Science of Knowledge*, Fichte and Schelling employ the term "postulate" with reference to its use in geometry. For example, Fichte remarks: "The first principle is a postulate. Just as geometrical instruction begins with the postulate that one describe space, so too must the reader or student of philosophy begin by doing something."⁹⁴ The idea is that just as the concept of space is something entirely indeterminate before we do certain things—draw a line between two points, or extend a line, or describe a circle with a specific center and radius—the concept of the "I" is something entirely indeterminate before we do something, namely, determine our freedom.

Schelling conveys a similar idea in "On Postulates in Philosophy." He begins the appendix to his 1797 *Treatise* by making the following claim: "The expression postulate is borrowed from mathematics. In geometry, the most primordial construction is not demonstrated but postulated. This most primordial (simplest) construction in space is the extended point or the straight line."⁹⁵ Just as in geometry the first construction (drawing a straight line) is one that determines the "direction" of a point, in philosophy the first construction (the self) is one that determines our inner sense: "If, consequently, we raise the question concerning the object of this [postulate], the answer will be: *the most primordial construction for the inner sense*. . . . The most primordial construction for the inner sense would thus have to be one by virtue of which the 'I' *itself first originates*."⁹⁶ Building on the ideas that I have developed in this chapter and in chapter 3, we can understand Schelling to be saying that our inner sense—the concept of the "I"—is something completely indeterminate, before we form for ourselves a specific concept of our own freedom. Moreover, as we saw earlier, our concept of freedom can be determined in one of two ways, each of which is expressed by a practical principle: "no subject and an absolute object," the principle of realism, or "no object and an absolute subject," the principle of idealism.⁹⁷

Thus, the claim that the German Idealist system is a "philosophy of the postulates" that begins with a primordial construction whose product is our self, can be understood to mean that we can construct the basic structure of the world from one or the other of these two practical principles, both of which are ways

⁹⁴ WLnM, IV, 3:344–345; FTP, 110.

⁹⁵ AEIW, 170; TEISK, 132.

⁹⁶ AEIW, 174; TEISK, 135.

⁹⁷ PBDK, 65; PLDC, 167.

of determining our own inner sense.⁹⁸ Earlier, we saw how Fichte attempts to “construct the world” based on the categorical imperative, which he understands as the practical demand that the object conform to the self.⁹⁹ In chapters 5 and 6, drawing on Schelling’s and Rosenzweig’s works, we will see how our world would appear—which categories would govern it—if we constructed it by upholding for ourselves a conception of freedom as a form of humility, and if God’s commandment of love were the practical principle that expressed this conception of freedom.

4. Fichte’s “Absolute I”: An All That Is One and Therefore Nothing?

In this final section, I return to the question whether Fichte’s system arrives at an explanatory ground for all relations in a way that does not result in nihilism. Earlier, we saw why the attempt to explain everything undermines the conditions that enable us to explain anything at all: if, in order to find an explanatory ground for all relations, we uphold the view that there is only one entity which exists and any multiplicity of entities is illusory, we will no longer be able to make this one entity intelligible, since to do so, we would have to be able to “read between” or “discover relations” between the one thing that exists and its properties—relations that we just claimed don’t really exist.¹⁰⁰ Our commitment to the principle of sufficient reason leads to an “All that [is] One and therefore Nothing.”¹⁰¹ Does this problem apply as well to Fichte’s “absolute I,” which Jacobi claims is merely an inversion of Spinoza’s “absolute substance”?

Earlier, I argued that we should not understand Fichte’s view that the possibility of all presentation is founded on our practical capacity to mean that

⁹⁸ WLn, IV, 3:344; FTP, 109.

⁹⁹ In the first introduction to *An Attempt at a New Presentation of the Wissenschaftslehre*, Fichte explains how this method differs from the method of Kant’s critical philosophy: “Whenever it acts, the intellect assigns a law to itself, and this act of legislation occurs in conformity with an even higher, necessary way of acting or representing. For example, the law of causality is not a primary or original law; instead, it is only one of the various ways in which a manifold can be combined. The law of causality can therefore be derived from the fundamental law governing such combination. . . . By proceeding in this way, Critical idealism allows the entire range of our representations to come into being gradually before the eyes of the reader or listener. On the other hand, it may attempt to grasp these same laws in the form in which they are already immediately applied to objects in any particular case; i.e., it may attempt to grasp them at their lowest level (in which case they are called ‘categories’),” VDWL, 201; ANPW, 27.

¹⁰⁰ Della Rocca (2012), 22–23.

¹⁰¹ Franks (2000), 98.

nothing exists except for the self. I also explained that, on Fichte's view, there is no real distinction between ideal activity and real activity: we cannot understand ideal activity without real activity, nor can we understand real activity without ideal activity; yet even if there is no real distinction between these two forms of activity, real activity is more basic, in the sense that it grounds ideal activity. This shows that Fichte believes there is a relation of dependence between real activity and ideal activity—both of which constitute the “absolute I”—and it shows that ideal activity is at least modally distinct from real activity. Does this mean that Fichte is committed to a weaker form of monism than existence monism? Is he committed to priority monism, “which holds that, while there is only one fundamental object,” that is, the “absolute I,” “things other than the one fundamental object may exist as dependent on the one fundamental object?”¹⁰² Unless we are determined to agree with Bertrand Russell's description of Fichte as the thinker who “abandoned ‘things in themselves,’ and carried subjectivism to a point which seems almost to involve a kind of insanity,” I don't believe that we have good reasons *not* to interpret more charitably Fichte's different formulations of the idea that “without a striving, no object at all is possible.”¹⁰³ Yet if we interpret Fichte's claim in this way, then Fichte is less committed to the principle of sufficient reason than Jacobi's and Della Rocca's Spinoza, since Fichte hasn't provided an explanation for the relation of dependence between ideal and real activity. Fichte hasn't provided an answer to the question that in the “Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism” Schelling says is the central question of philosophy: “How [does] the absolute . . . come out of itself and oppose to itself a world?” Or, “Why is there a realm of experience at all?”¹⁰⁴ It seems that we are left with two unsatisfying options: to uphold our epistemological commitments, nihilistic as they may be, or to abandon the traditional task of metaphysics, which is to show that philosophy is a universal science capable of providing an unconditioned or comprehensive rational explanation for human experience, an option that would amount to giving up on the project of German Idealism.

¹⁰² Properly speaking, we can't say that the “absolute I” is an object; on Fichte's view, it is an activity. Della Rocca (2012), 16. See Schaffer (2010).

¹⁰³ Russell (1945), 718. In a manner that grants the existence of the external world. GW, 399; FSK, 233. The Aristotelian language of material and formal causation also helps us understand why Fichte isn't Russell's caricature. Fichte's claim that “without a striving, no object at all is possible,” can be understood to mean that although the matter out of which things are made is independent of the self, the arrangement, shape, or appearance of things depends on the striving of the self. For Aristotle's fourfold account of causation, see *Aristotle's Metaphysics* (1979), Δ1, 1013a.

¹⁰⁴ PBDK, 77–78; PLDC, 174–175.

Conclusion

In closing this chapter, let me point out that previous chapters have already given us the resources to move beyond this dialectic. We have already seen that Jacobi, Fichte, and Schelling do not understand the fact that there is a limit to what we can explain as a philosophical shortcoming, but as an insight that enables us to ask the right question, the question that we were trying, but failing, to ask all along. Fichte and Schelling don't claim that the starting point for philosophy is an arbitrary assumption, but a practical principle that is interwoven with a conception of freedom to which we are committed. Thus, if we cannot satisfy reason's demand for the unconditioned in human knowledge theoretically, we must move to the practical and realize it there. It is in this sense that Fichte and Schelling provide us with a therapy for the conflict of reason. Moreover, like Jacobi, Fichte and Schelling believe that the idea that we can only realize the unconditioned practically is the most important lesson we can learn from Kant's critical philosophy. As Jacobi observes, "First Critical Philosophy undermines metaphysics theoretically, for the love of science; then . . . it undermines science practically, for the love of metaphysics."¹⁰⁵

Yet we will see in the next chapter that in his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809), Schelling raises his own, different, version of Jacobi's nihilism complaint. We will see, too, that in the attempt to address this version of the complaint, Schelling develops the view that practical reason is the vehicle for the self-disclosing of the Absolute. As I hope to show, Schelling's view enables us to affirm anew the value of the world and human action in the world because it implies that it is through human action that God is both cognized and realized.

¹⁰⁵ 1815 Vorrede, 395; 1815 Preface, 556.

PART THREE

NIHILISM AND
THE AFFIRMATION OF
THE WORLD IN SCHELLING
AND ROSENZWEIG

Why Is There a Realm of Experience at All?

Love and Defiance as the Two Forms of Human Individuation

How [does] the absolute . . . come out of itself and oppose to itself a world? . . . Why is there a realm of experience at all?

—F. W. J. Schelling

The absolute, if represented as realized (as existing), becomes objective; it becomes an object of *knowledge* and therewith ceases to be an object of *freedom*. And nothing is left for the finite subject but to annihilate itself as subject in order to become identical, through such self-annihilation, with that object.

—F. W. J. Schelling

Introduction

Chapter 4 bequeathed us a task: Fichte's argument for monism issues in the view that there is a single fundamental entity, the "absolute I," which is constituted by two principles, a real and an ideal principle, or which is constituted by two forms of activity, real and ideal activity. On a charitable interpretation, this view should be regarded as a form of priority monism: while there is a relation of dependence between these two forms of activity—real activity grounds ideal activity—they are at least modally, if not really, distinct.¹ Yet, in the Jena period, Fichte does not seem to provide an adequate explanation for the distinction between these two forms of activity. If so, then it appears as if Fichte gives up on the project of post-Kantian German Idealism, which I have characterized as an attempt to provide a comprehensive rational explanation for all aspects of human experience.

¹ See chapter 4, 173.

My aim in this chapter is to show that both Schelling's *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* (1809) and his *Ages of the World* fragments of 1811–15 are motivated by an attempt to provide an explanation for the distinction and relation of dependence between real and ideal activity. Keeping in mind that, on Fichte and Schelling's view, the relation between real and ideal activity is another name for the relation between subject and object that characterizes all states of human consciousness, these two works offer an answer to the question that Schelling considers to be the central question of philosophy: "How [does] the absolute . . . come out of itself and oppose to itself a world?"² Or, "Why is there a realm of experience at all?"³ As we will see, in his attempt to answer this question, Schelling moves toward the view that human experience is grounded in three irreducible elements—God, the natural world, and human beings—which relate to one another in three temporal dimensions: Creation, Revelation, and Redemption.

1. Schelling's Nihilism Complaint in the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*

In the *Investigations of Human Freedom*, Schelling revisits Jacobi's complaint against the nihilistic and fatalistic consequences of a monistic philosophical system, and he defends his own version of the complaint.⁴ Because Schelling, like Jacobi, considers Spinoza's philosophy to be the paradigmatic philosophical system, and because Spinoza identifies the single entity that exists with God or nature, Schelling phrases his version of the complaint in terms of the nihilistic and fatalistic consequences of pantheism. Schelling opens the *Investigations of Human Freedom* by observing, "according to an old but in no way forgotten legend, the concept of freedom is in fact said to be completely incompatible with system, and every philosophy making claim to unity and wholeness should end up with the denial of freedom."⁵ Yet, on Schelling's view, the worry that pantheism leads to fatalism has not been phrased with sufficient precision. In the introduction to the *Investigations of Human Freedom*, Schelling claims that if we

² See chapter 4, 173.

³ PBDK, 77–78; PLDC, 174–175.

⁴ In what follows, I will refer to the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* as the *Investigations of Human Freedom*.

⁵ PU, 9; PI, 9. Although Schelling's claim has often been taken to be an allusion to Jacobi, we have seen that Jacobi's complaint is far more complex than the bald claim that a philosophical system is incompatible with freedom.

understand pantheism, “the doctrine of the immanence of things in God,” in the sense that all finite things depend on God, pantheism is not incompatible with freedom.⁶ As Schelling points out by drawing an analogy with the causality of organic life, the fact that every organism depends on another organism for its genesis does not mean that it remains in the other’s thrall: “An individual body part, like the eye, is only possible within the whole of an organism; nonetheless, it has its own life for itself, indeed, its own kind of freedom which it obviously proves through the disease of which it is capable.”⁷ Moreover, if we understand the doctrine that all things are immanent in God in the sense that all finite things depend on God, Schelling contends that pantheism demands freedom: “On the contrary, it would be far more contradictory, if the dependent or consequent were not independent. That would be a dependency without a dependent, a consequence without a consequent.”⁸ Thus, Schelling unsettles the view that it is the doctrine of immanence that leads to the denial of freedom.⁹ As Heidegger asks in his 1936 lectures on Schelling’s *Investigations*, “If pantheism leads to fatalism, this cannot be due to the doctrine of immanence as such. But to what then?”¹⁰

⁶ PU, 11; PI, 11. This shows that Schelling is committed to priority monism, not existence monism. If so, then it might seem that Schelling is just assuming a weak formulation of the principle of sufficient reason and no longer addressing Jacobi’s (and Della Rocca’s) worries. Yet, as I explain in section 4, Schelling does provide an explanation for the relation of dependence between God and finite beings: he draws on the kabbalistic doctrine of *tsimtsum*, or divine contraction, to explain the creation of the finite world as an act of divine withdrawal or self-limitation, which is in turn the condition of possibility for human individuation. For a thorough discussion of the reasons that led Schelling to understand pantheism as the view that all finite things depend on God, see Heidegger (1985), 86: “The statements of pantheism read: (1) everything is God, (2) individual things are God, (3) God is everything. The first two statements and interpretations of pantheism turned out to be ‘insipid’ because God’s nature is annihilated in them and precisely that is lost in relation to which everything and individual things are supposed to be in God. The third statement alone is permissible, but at first as a question. And the question must be geared to the meaning of the ‘is.’ We found the identity of S and P stated in a proposition in general and, in this proposition in particular, the identity of God and everything cannot be understood as mere identicalness, but as the belonging together of what is different on the basis of a more primordial unity. . . . With pantheism the dependence of beings on God is posited.” I do not delve into the details of Schelling’s argument here because, in chapter 4, I explained that we should understand the relationship between the finite and infinite in terms of dependence. See Snow (1996), 152: “Schelling’s first concern in the introduction is to persuade his readers that there is no essential antagonism between the idea of freedom and the idea of system.”

⁷ PU, 19; PI, 18. In the terms that I used in chapter 4, the language of disease shows that pantheism can be understood as a form of monism, “priority monism,” according to which the part depends on the one fundamental entity that exists, but which is less radical than “existence monism,” according to which only one entity exists. See chapter 4, 173.

⁸ PU, 19; PI, 17.

⁹ It isn’t clear whether in this passage Schelling is alluding to Jacobi or to someone else.

¹⁰ Heidegger (1985), 74.

On Schelling's view, the denial of freedom is not necessarily connected with pantheism, but with Spinoza's mechanistic conception of God and nature.¹¹ As Schelling remarks, "Spinoza . . . must be a fatalist for a completely different reason, one independent of pantheism. . . . The error of his system lies by no means in his placing things *in God*, but in the fact that they are *things*."¹² Because the idea that God acts with a purpose or end in view suggests that God seeks something that he lacks, Spinoza eliminates teleological explanation from his *Ethics* and reduces all explanation to efficient causation.¹³ This means that Spinoza treats the will as a thing, as something that is passively determined by another thing that is in turn determined by another thing *ad infinitum*.¹⁴

By contrast, the central aim of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, during the period between 1797 and 1806, is to reconsider the nature of matter and give Kant's idea that nature as a whole can be conceived of as an organism the status of a constitutive principle.¹⁵ In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Kant proposed that the gulf between the domains of nature and freedom could be bridged if we conceived an overall teleology or inner purposiveness of nature.¹⁶ Yet for

¹¹ See Snow (1996), 154: "The source of Spinoza's fatalism is not pantheism, but his mechanistic conception of God and the world."

¹² PU, 21–22; PI, 20.

¹³ Spinoza (2000), part I, appendix: "But if the things produced by God were brought about to enable him to attain an end, then of necessity the last things for the sake of which the earlier things were brought about would excel all others. Again, this doctrine negates God's perfection; for if God acts with an end in view, he must necessarily be seeking something that he lacks." This passage makes it clear that, on Spinoza's view, mechanism follows from immanence: since nothing is external to God's nature, He can't act for a purpose. If this is so, then it seems one cannot embrace immanence and deny mechanism, leaving room for freedom (which seems to be Schelling's position). Yet the resources to support Schelling's position can be found in Herder's influential interpretation of Spinoza in his *God, Some Conversations*. For a helpful discussion of this issue, see Lindner (1960), 92–93, 174–175; and Förster (2012).

¹⁴ ÜLS, 20–21; CDS, 189: "The whole thing comes down to this: from fatalism I immediately conclude against fatalism and everything connected with it.—If there are only efficient, but no final causes, then the only function that the faculty of thought has in the whole of nature is that of observer; its proper business is to accompany the mechanism of the efficient causes."

¹⁵ For a helpful discussion of Schelling's critique of Kant's conception of matter, see Förster (2001).

¹⁶ See KU, 5:373: "Now although there is an incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible, so that from the former to the latter (thus by means of the theoretical use of reason) no transition is possible, just as if there were so many different worlds, the first of which can have no influence on the second: yet the latter should have an influence on the former, namely the concept of freedom should make the end that is imposed by its laws real in the sensible world; and nature must consequently also be able to be conceived in such a way that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the ends that are to be realized in it in accordance with the laws of freedom.—Thus there must still be a ground of the unity of the supersensible that grounds nature with that which the concept of freedom contains practically, the concept of which, even if it does not suffice for cognition

different reasons, including the fact that conceiving an overall teleology of nature would require conceiving a form of causality that the finite human intellect—which is governed by the principle of efficient causation—cannot grasp, Kant held that we could not know whether anything real satisfied the concept of inner purposiveness.¹⁷ On Kant's view, both the principle of purposiveness and the concept of a natural end serve only as regulative principles, which we are entitled to use when we reflect on nature and try to make possible a system of experience by subsuming individuals under universals, and species under genera. As Kant claims, "The concept of a thing as in itself a natural end is therefore not a constitutive concept of the understanding or of reason, but it can still be a regulative concept for the reflecting power of judgment."¹⁸ However, if the principle of purposiveness is conceived as a constitutive principle, then nature as a whole can be considered as an organism, and all the different forms of matter, all the species of minerals, plants, and animals, can be seen as expressions of a single living force that is the cause and effect of itself.¹⁹ On Schelling's view, every organic and inorganic entity strives to produce itself according to its own concept, so that the effect of its activity can also be understood as its cause. In the introduction to the *Investigations of Human Freedom*, Schelling claims that this idea, that "there is no other Being than will," or that "freedom [is] the one and all of philosophy," is the greatest achievement of idealism. Since now there is no longer a split between the domains of nature and freedom—both are governed by the

of it either theoretically or practically, and thus has no proper domain of its own, nevertheless makes possible the transition from the manner of thinking in accordance with the principles of the one to that in accordance with the principles of the other." For Kant's discussion of the features that distinguish something as a natural end (*Naturzweck*), see §§63–65 in the third *Critique*.

¹⁷ See KU, 5:373: "The causal nexus, insofar as it is conceived merely by the *understanding*, is a connection that constitutes a series (of causes and effects) that is always descending; and the things themselves, which as effects presuppose others as their causes, cannot conversely be the causes of these at the same time. This causal nexus is called that of efficient causes. In contrast, however, a causal nexus can also be conceived in accordance with a concept of *reason* (of ends), which, if considered as a series, would carry with it descending as well as ascending dependency, in which the thing which is on the one hand designated as an effect nevertheless deserves, in ascent, the name of a cause of the same thing of which it is the effect. . . . Such a causal connection is called that of final causes." See also Kreines (2008).

¹⁸ KU, 5:376. See also Kosch (2006), 66: "[Schelling] (like Hegel after him) followed the suggestion Kant had made in the *Critique of Judgment*: that the tension between theoretical and moral standpoints might be resolvable through the regulative idea of an overall teleology of nature. Schelling's early philosophy of nature . . . was an attempt to show how a version of Kant's principle of teleology could have the status (to use Kant's terminology) of an objectively and not merely subjectively valid principle, and how its application could be extended to inorganic as well as organic nature."

¹⁹ See Beiser (2002), 517.

principle of teleology—Schelling calls this form of idealism a “higher realism.”²⁰ As Heidegger points out, the idea that all forms of matter are imbued with life enables us to understand the meaning of pantheism more precisely than through the doctrine of immanence: “We have now arrived at the answer to the question really raised with the term ‘pantheism.’ Being is will.”²¹ We can see, then, that if idealism culminates in the identification of Being with the will, pantheism is idealism, or what Schelling calls a higher realism.²²

Schelling associates the idea that every organic and inorganic entity strives to produce itself according to its own concept with the idea that “freedom [is] the one and all of philosophy,” because he understands what he calls the “formal” concept of freedom in Kantian terms, as autonomy or rational self-determination.²³ Yet Schelling’s concept of freedom as rational self-determination differs from the Kantian concept in two fundamental respects. First, transcendental freedom, which as we saw in chapter 3 is the form of freedom that, on Kant’s view, is necessary for genuine autonomy, requires the capacity to determine oneself on the basis of a principle that has no foundation in one’s sensuous nature.²⁴ Yet for reasons that I will explain shortly, Schelling’s notion of rational self-determination does not require that the agent be capable of determining herself on the basis of a principle that has no foundation in her sensuous nature. Second, as we will see below, Schelling’s conception of rational self-determination eliminates the “ought” and “is” distinction that characterizes Kantian morality; in doing so, it turns freedom into a form of fate. Thus, in Schelling’s works the antinomy between freedom and nature turns into the antinomy between freedom and necessity. Discussing these two differences between how Schelling and Kant conceive the notion of rational self-determination will prepare us to better understand Schelling’s formulation of the nihilism complaint in the *Investigations of Human Freedom*.

In the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), Schelling provides a broad interpretation of the Kantian view that autonomy is development in accordance with one’s own rational nature. As Michelle Kosch explains, on Schelling’s view, an entity is self-determining as long as it develops in accordance with its own concept or essence:

Every natural product has a rational nature in this broad sense, and so one’s rational nature is now also one’s natural nature (if I may put it that

²⁰ PU, 24; PI, 22. See Beiser (2002), 530: “What Fichte once said about the ego—that its nature is only activity—Schelling now declares to be true of nature itself.”

²¹ Heidegger (1985), 95.

²² Cf. Fuhrmans (1954), 297.

²³ PU, 23; PI, 21.

²⁴ See KpV, 5:97: “transcendental freedom, which must be thought as independence from everything empirical and so from nature generally.”

way). This is not to say that Schelling views human agents in the same way as plants, but he does see a strong analogy between them: both are self-governing systems which cause themselves to develop in accordance with dynamically conceived essences. The result is that rational self-determination no longer requires as a postulate the ability of the agent to separate himself from nature as it did in Kant.²⁵ The law one gives oneself is just another law of nature.²⁶

Schelling's conception of rational self-determination draws on Leibniz's views on the nature of individuation. For example, in the *Discourse on Metaphysics* (1686), Leibniz holds that each individual substance has "a notion so complete that it is sufficient to contain and to allow us to deduce from it all the predicates of the subject to which this notion is attributed."²⁷ Had we God's perspective, we would be able to see how the actions (the predicates) of each individual substance follow with necessity from its individual notion or haecceity, but the fact that we are confined to a finite perspective creates the appearance of freedom: our finite perspective accounts for our conviction that we, or that others, could have acted differently.²⁸ In the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling explains in similar fashion our experience of freedom. He portrays history as the progressive self-disclosing activity of the Absolute, an activity in which each empirical subject plays a role. The appearance of freedom is attributed to the fact that from within history, the subject cannot comprehend the specific role of its actions within the greater whole:

But now if this absolute that can everywhere only reveal itself, had actually and fully revealed itself in history, or were ever to do so, it

²⁵ I believe it is somewhat misleading to say that Kantian morality requires that the agent "separate" himself from nature. Kant says that the moral law "restricts" self-love and renders it "rational." See KpV, 5:73.

²⁶ Kosch (2006), 77.

²⁷ Leibniz (1991), 8.

²⁸ See Leibniz (1991), 8: "On the other hand, God, seeing Alexander's individual notion or haecceity, sees in it at the same time the basis and reason for all the predicates which can be said truly of him, for example, that he vanquished Darius and Porus; he even knows *a priori* (and not by experience) whether he died a natural death or whether he was poisoned, something we can know only through history. Thus when we consider carefully the connection of things, we can say that from all time in Alexander's soul there are vestiges of everything that has happened to him and even traces of everything that happens in the universe, even though God alone could recognize them all." The fact that Schelling draws on Leibniz's metaphysics does not amount to a form of pre-Kantian dogmatism, because Schelling supports his metaphysics by a form of transcendental argument. Schelling clarifies his method of argumentation when he says in the introduction to the *Investigations of Human Freedom* that his task is to "connect the concept of freedom with the whole of a worldview." See PU, 11; PI, 10–11. In chapter 2, I noted that Maimon's principle of determinability also draws on Leibniz's views on the nature of individuation. See chapter 2, 83n130.

would at once put an end to the appearance of freedom. . . . If the absolute synthesis were ever completely developed, we would see that everything that has come about through freedom in the course of history was lawlike in this whole, and that all actions, though they seemed to be free, were in fact necessary, precisely in order to bring forth this whole.²⁹

We can see how this passage reworks the Leibnizian idea that if we could transcend our finite perspective, the actions, or predicates, of each individual substance could be deduced from its complete concept: Schelling suggests that from the perspective of the Absolute, the actions that we experience as the result of free choice would be seen as the result of a necessary development. We can also see how the passage transforms freedom into a form of fate: we can only perform a moral action freely if we can determine ourselves in a manner that is contrary to what duty demands, yet the conception of freedom that Schelling develops in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* effectively eradicates this possibility.³⁰ As Kosch rightly points out:

The law of the will's causality—the moral law—has been transformed from an 'ought' to an 'is'.³¹ Though one can make sense of a certain sort of contingency on this view, in the form of the possibility that some things might fail to actualize their natural potential, one cannot make sense of a capacity on the part of any natural product to choose not to fulfill its natural end. And since natural ends are not chosen by empirical individuals, the idea that an agent might choose to fulfill a different set of ends makes no sense.³²

We will see below that a similar problem emerges in connection with Kant's conception of freedom as rational self-determination. Yet this brief discussion of Schelling's conception of freedom in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* has prepared us to better understand the trajectory of thought that Schelling traverses in his introduction to the *Investigations of Human Freedom*,

²⁹ StI, 300; STI, 209–210.

³⁰ Kant and Schelling would disagree on this point. As we saw in chapter 3, in the introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant rejects the idea that freedom consists in the ability to determine oneself against one's lawgiving reason. See MS, 6:226.

³¹ See KrV, A547/B575: "The ought expresses a species of necessity and a connection with grounds which does not occur anywhere else in the whole of nature. In nature the understanding can cognize only what exists, or has been, or will be. It is impossible that something in it ought to be other than what, in all these time-relations, it in fact is indeed, the ought, if one has merely the course of nature before one's eyes, has no significance whatever."

³² Kosch (2006), 79–80.

a trajectory that leads from pantheism to idealism, and from idealism to nihilism and fatalism.

Let me summarize what we have covered so far. Schelling claims that pantheism is not incompatible with freedom if we understand pantheism as the view that all finite things depend on God (not as the view that all finite things are *in* God), and if we reject Spinoza's mechanistic conception of God and nature, and instead conceive all of nature as a single organism. Given Schelling's conception of the nature of Being—"Will is primal Being"—pantheism is idealism.³³ The complaint that pantheism leads to fatalism and to the annihilation of individuality is misplaced, since it is not primarily the doctrine of the immanence of things in God that leads to these consequences. Yet Schelling develops his own version of the complaint. He believes that we must go beyond the idealist thought of making freedom the "one and all of philosophy." Why?

The problem is that now nothing distinguishes human freedom from the freedom of all other entities. As Schelling comments, "Mere idealism does not reach far enough . . . in order to show the specific difference, that is, precisely what is the distinctiveness, of human freedom."³⁴ If idealism culminates in the thought that all natural entities are free or self-determined—what Schelling calls the "formal" concept of freedom—Schelling moves beyond idealism insofar as he conceives human freedom as the "capacity for good and evil."³⁵ The capacity for good and evil is what, on Schelling's view, sets human freedom apart from the freedom of all other entities; and for reasons that will become clear below, the existence of the finite world, the condition that first brings about the separation between subject and object that characterizes human consciousness, is the condition of possibility for this capacity.

I mentioned in chapter 3 that in the introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant rejects the idea that freedom consists in the *ability* to determine oneself against one's lawgiving reason—the capacity for evil. Kant follows the standard philosophical position, according to which capacities are defined with reference to their proper ends, not with respect to their privations.³⁶ I believe that two related considerations motivate Schelling's heterodox conception of freedom. First, the realization that any account of freedom that reduces

³³ PU, 23; PI, 21.

³⁴ PU, 24; PI, 22.

³⁵ PU, 25; PI, 23.

³⁶ MS, 6:226. In *The Form of Practical Knowledge*, Stephen Engstrom clarifies in a helpful way why, within a Kantian framework, evil can only be understood as a form of error, as the *misuse* of a capacity. See Engstrom (2009), 108–111. By conceiving evil as the exercise of a capacity, Schelling departs from this standard philosophical position.

freedom to rational self-determination—whether it be Kant’s, Fichte’s, Hegel’s, or even Schelling’s own earlier views—fails to account for the possibility of evil as a positive capacity.³⁷ Second, conceiving human freedom as the capacity for good and evil renders intelligible the modal distinction and relation of dependence between real and ideal activity. In chapter 4, we saw that, on Fichte and Schelling’s view, the relation between real and ideal activity is just another name for the relation between subject and object that characterizes all states of human consciousness.³⁸ Thus, if conceiving human freedom as the capacity for good and evil in some sense explains this relation, it also answers the question that Schelling considers to be the central question of philosophy: “How [does] the absolute . . . come out of itself and oppose to itself a world?” Or, “Why is there a realm of experience at all?”³⁹ In *Freedom and Reason*, Michelle Kosch provides a brilliant analysis of the first motivation for Schelling’s heterodox conception of freedom, but she does not discuss the second motivation, which is interwoven with the systematic task that defines post-Kantian German Idealism.

Let’s consider in greater detail these two related motivations for Schelling’s conception of freedom. As Kosch rightly notes:

The fundamental idea of the ethics of autonomy is the idea that the moral law is normative for the will in virtue of being the will’s own law. This is the source both of the interest in the idea—its explanation of why we are bound by moral requirements—and its difficulty. The difficulty lies in saying what it means for the moral law to be the will’s own in a way that does not rule out the possibility of intentionally thwarting the law.⁴⁰

In chapter 3, I argued that, on a Fichtean interpretation of Kant’s Deduction of Freedom, moral obligation has its *ground* in the mind’s self-affection. I interpreted the *Factum* as a moment in which I posit myself as a particular person by upholding for myself an ideal that I regard as the highest standard or norm for my conduct; if we accept Kant’s invitation, this ideal is the ideal of autonomy or rational self-determination. Yet I also explained why, on Kant’s view, if I am to attain my humanity or personality, I *cannot* act otherwise than under the ideal of pure or rational self-determination; I *must* act under the idea or ideal of transcendental freedom. In order to be a person, I must constitute

³⁷ Given that Kant believes that human beings have an original predisposition to personality—to be motivated by respect for the moral law—the possibility of evil as a positive capacity would mean the capacity to deny one’s humanity or personality.

³⁸ See chapter 4, 173.

³⁹ PBDK, 77–78; PLDC, 174–175.

⁴⁰ Kosch (2006), 2.

myself as a particular person; in order to do that, I must value myself under certain descriptions and assume responsibility for the values that I endorse in doing so. So the commitment to my value as a person-in-general—the commitment to my value as a rational being—is the condition of possibility for all of my other existential commitments; it is the commitment that enables me to constitute myself as a particular person.⁴¹ If this is so, then as Kosch points out, “the Kantian view makes comprehensible only one determination of the will—will to the good.”⁴² Or, as Schelling phrases the point, “in accordance with [the idealist] explanation, there is . . . only one will (if it can otherwise be called that), not a dual will.”⁴³ This is a problem, because if determination requires contrast with or opposition against something else, it seems like the Kantian view both demands and prevents us from making sense of the idea that, in upholding the moral law, we *determine* ourselves as particular individuals.⁴⁴

Kant was aware of this problem, a version of which had been raised by Carl Christian Erhard Schmid in the second (1788) edition of his *Wörterbuch zum leichten Gebrauch der Kantischen Schriften*.⁴⁵ In an effort to address this problem, Kant clarifies in the first two books of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* how he conceives the volitional structure of moral evil, and he seems to provide an account of its possibility as a positive choice. Because Kant holds that no human being can “repudiate the moral law,” and because he holds that all human beings are affected by the incentives of their sensuous nature, moral evil consists in the manner in which a person incorporates the moral law and the law of self-love into her maxims:⁴⁶

Hence the difference, whether the human being is good or evil, must not lie in the difference between the incentives that he incorporates into his maxim (not in the material of the maxim) but in their subordination (in the form of the maxim): which of the two he makes the condition of the other. It follows that the human being (even the best) is evil only

⁴¹ See chapter 3, 141.

⁴² Kosch (2006), 92. See Heidegger (1985), 99: “Idealism understood freedom as the determination of the pure ego, as self-determination for the law, as self-legislation in good will. Only this will is good.”

⁴³ PU, 44; PI, 39.

⁴⁴ See Heidegger (1985), 51: “If the freedom of man, and that means of every individual man, exists, then with this existence something is posited in which and in opposition to which the individual individualizes itself.”

⁴⁵ For helpful discussions of this background, see Franks (2005a), 268–270; Kosch (2006), 52–57; Buchheim (2011), 12; and Allison (1990), 133–136.

⁴⁶ RGV, 6:36.

because he reverses the moral order of his incentives in incorporating them into his maxims.⁴⁷

The evil person, instead of subordinating the incentives of her sensuous nature under the moral law, regards those incentives “as of themselves sufficient for the determination of [her] power of choice, without minding the moral law.”⁴⁸ Or in the terms that I employed in chapter 3, the evil person, instead of committing herself to the value of her humanity or rationality, commits herself only to the value of her sensuous nature.

Kant seems to provide an account of the possibility of moral evil by tracing it back to a choice taking place outside of time, which determines the agent’s character or moral disposition: “The disposition (*Gesinnung*), i.e. the first subjective ground of the adoption of the maxims, can only be a single one, and it applies to the entire use of freedom universally. This disposition too, however, must be adopted through the free power of choice (*Willkür*), for otherwise it could not be imputed.”⁴⁹ We should note, first, that the distinction between the will (*Wille*) and the power of choice (*Willkür*) that Kant develops in the *Metaphysics of Morals* is implicit in this discussion: the will determines the agent’s basic character or power of choice.⁵⁰ Second, the argument that Kant provides for his view that this choice must be conceived as one taking place in an eternal past is a version of the argument for monism that I explained in chapter 4, an argument that led to Fichte’s notion of the subject that posits itself, of which we are aware pre-reflectively.

As we saw, the idea of the self-positing subject is meant to address a general regress problem that emerges when we attempt to explain consciousness—including cognitive, volitional, and affective states—and assume that the representational structure of consciousness is the only model available to us for describing a form of self-awareness.⁵¹ Kant says that “there cannot be any further

⁴⁷ RGV, 6:36.

⁴⁸ RGV, 6:36.

⁴⁹ RGV, 6:26.

⁵⁰ See MS, 6:226. As Kosch points out, though, this distinction is not sufficient enough to explain the possibility of moral evil. See Kosch (2006), 55n26: “Note that the distinction between *Wille* and *Willkür*—which Kant evidently introduced in order to rebut the contention that he had equated the will’s transcendental freedom with its capacity for rational self-determination—in fact does nothing to remedy the problem. *Wille* is practical reason; it legislates the moral law. *Willkür* is the power of choice which forms the maxims that guide action. The distinction between these capacities cannot solve the problem unless one can conceive of a relation between them that allows both that the legislation of *Wille* determine *Willkür*’s maxims and that *Willkür* be capable of forming maxims that prioritize the incentives of the agent’s sensible nature over the moral law’s demands. If one denies the first, one thereby denies that the legislation of *Wille* is *Willkür*’s own law; if one denies the second, one denies that evil is possible as a free choice.”

⁵¹ See chapter 4, 153–154.

cognition of the subjective ground or the cause of this adoption [of character or disposition] . . . for otherwise we would have to adduce still another maxim into which the disposition would have to be incorporated.”⁵² In other words, if we consider the general structure of an action through the “standard or default understanding of the distinction between actions and events in the modern Western tradition,” where actions are conceived as events resulting from a particular, specifiable intention, and where the “proper focus for any explanation of an action is on this causally efficacious, determinate, prior mental state or intention,” in order to understand our choice of character or disposition *as an act*, we will have to “adduce still another maxim” or intention to determine ourselves in this particular way.⁵³ But this would require that we already be behind the act that, on Kant’s view, first brings us into being as particular individuals. Since we already have at our disposal Fichte’s solution to a similar problem, let’s consider if it can help us solve Kant’s problem. What if we argued that, in order to explain how all volitional states, including our fundamental choice of character, can be imputed to us, we must presuppose a form or structure of action in which the subject is at once the cause and effect of itself, without the mediation of an intention? Or, employing Fichte’s language, the form or structure of action that must be presupposed in all volitional states is one in which we are *at once subject and object*, “without any mediation at all.”⁵⁴ This seems to be the conclusion to which we are led by Kant’s argument, but notice that the first premise—“in order to explain how all volitional states can be imputed to us”—asks the reader to adopt as her own the ideal of explaining all aspects of human experience, including how actions can be imputed. By now, the methodological implications of this idea should be familiar: Kant’s argument cannot be established purely by logical entailment or deductive inference. Just as no one can coerce me to uphold a specific idea or ideal of freedom, no one can coerce me to uphold a specific philosophical task.⁵⁵

Even after this reconstruction of Kant’s argument for the imputability of our choice of disposition or moral character, we should still ask if Kant’s discussion

⁵² RGV, 6:26.

⁵³ Pippin (2008), 220.

⁵⁴ WLnM, IV, 3:347; FTP, 114. Cf. Allison (1990), 152–154.

⁵⁵ See Franks (2005a), 320: “Here Fichte is applying his version of the Kantian thesis that commitment to the moral law involves aiming at the highest good as a goal, not to the moral life, but to *philosophy*. The thought is that one cannot acknowledge the supreme normative force of the moral law without at the same time aiming at a condition in which an absolute first principle grounds all other principles, thereby grounding all valid forms of grounding in a way that escapes the Agrippan trilemma. Within the moral life, this means that one should aim at what Fichte calls ‘a moral world order.’ Within philosophy, it means that one should aim at the completion of the German idealist system.”

of moral evil as the result of a choice taking place outside of time in fact explains its possibility *as a positive choice*.⁵⁶ If, in order to determine myself as a particular person, I must commit myself to the value of my humanity or rationality—I must commit myself to being a person-in-general—and if on Kant’s view, this is just what it means to determine myself toward the good, in what sense can the determination toward evil be a genuine choice?⁵⁷ How could we explain or understand why any person would determine herself toward evil?⁵⁸ In chapter 3, I clarified Kant’s views on our incentive for morality: since moral action—the determination of our will in accordance with laws given by our own reason—is the means by which we attain personality, we have a natural *interest* in acting morally. If this is so, then on Kant’s view, evil is *groundless*; it is a form of practical suicide.⁵⁹ Indeed, Kant confronts the incomprehensibility of moral evil: “The original predisposition (which none other than the human being himself could have corrupted, if this corruption is to be imputed to him) is a predisposition to good; there is no conceivable *ground* for us, therefore, from which moral evil could first have come in us.”⁶⁰ We have seen how a version of this problem affects the conception of freedom as rational self-determination that Schelling develops in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*: if all entities develop according to their own concept or essence, we can conceive of the possibility that some things might fail to actualize their natural potential, but we cannot make sense of a “capacity on the part of any natural product to choose not to fulfill its natural end.”⁶¹

⁵⁶ The problem can also be phrased by saying that, on Kant’s view, something that is not represented as a good cannot be the object of the free power of choice. See Engstrom (2009), 44–54. See also Rödl (2007), 45–49.

⁵⁷ See Snow (1996), 170: “The awareness of the harmony of the self with the larger law-governed order of which it forms a part is both a cognizance of rational structure and a sense of place—of respect—for both oneself and the larger whole. . . . Transgression against this order always involves both a distorted view of the self and a rationality employed in defense of this distortion.”

⁵⁸ As Allison explains, there is a perfectly straightforward sense in which we can explain from within a Kantian framework the propensity to evil: on Kant’s view, we cannot attribute a propensity to good to sensuously affected agents such as ourselves, since that would mean that moral incentives would always outweigh the incentives of self-love, and that is an ideal of moral perfection that is unobtainable by finite beings. Yet, as Allison observes, if we explain the propensity to evil in these terms, we risk reducing Kant’s doctrine of radical evil to the “rather unremarkable claim that the human will is not capable of holiness,” Allison (1990), 156.

⁵⁹ See Kosch (2006), 53n22.

⁶⁰ My emphasis. RGV, 6:43. See Kosch (2006), 92: “The Kantian view makes comprehensible only one determination of the will—will to the good. . . . The second, that the intellectual principle permits the sensuous impulses to take precedence, has the result that evil is unintelligible, ‘For why does the intellectual principle not exercise its power?’” For helpful discussion of Kant’s views on the propensity to evil in human nature, see Allison (1990), 146–161.

⁶¹ Kosch (2006), 79.

In the remaining three sections of this chapter, I will argue that Schelling attempts to solve the problem concerning the groundlessness or incomprehensibility of evil by holding that the human person determines or individuates herself in relation to or in opposition to the divine person: if the human person individuates herself in relation to or in opposition to the divine person, evil can be explained as a form of defiance, and goodness as a form of love. On Schelling's view, the possibility of these two different forms of individuation is what sets human freedom apart from the freedom of all other entities. Importantly, we will also see that Schelling's solution to this problem indirectly explains the distinction between subject and object that characterizes all states of human consciousness.

2. The Reality of Evil, the Question of Theism, and the Jointure of Being

In the *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* and in the *Ages of the World* fragments of 1811–15, Schelling sought to develop a metaphysical theory that could frame and support his late views on the nature of human freedom and moral agency. Heidegger phrases the central question that the *Investigations of Human Freedom* seeks to address as follows: “How can the reality of evil be brought into harmony with the system? The previous system has become impossible. How is the reality of evil to be thought?”⁶² In other words, Schelling's question concerns the reality—the ontological foundation—of evil, the question that eluded Kant in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*.⁶³ The previous, idealistic, system has become impossible, because it identifies Being with the will, understood as rational self-determination. Thus, if an ontological foundation for evil is to be found, Schelling must move beyond the idealist attempt to make freedom “the one and all of philosophy,” and he must reconsider the nature of Being and the ground of all beings, God.⁶⁴ It is for this reason that “the question of God and the totality of the world, the question of ‘theism’ in the broadest sense” appears anew in Schelling's late works.⁶⁵

One might think that the only way to provide an ontological foundation for evil, while retaining the traditional view that evil cannot arise from God as pure

⁶² Heidegger (1985), 99.

⁶³ My claim is not that Kant sees but fails to provide a satisfying answer to the question concerning the possibility of evil, understood as the exercise of a capacity, but that the Kantian framework excludes that possibility.

⁶⁴ PU, 23; PI, 21.

⁶⁵ Heidegger (1985), 61.

goodness, is to adopt a Manichaeian or dualistic philosophy, and posit evil as a second equipotent power alongside of God. Yet that would mean renouncing the systematic task of philosophy, for as we have seen, that task consists in the attempt to meet reason's demand for a comprehensive and unified explanation of human experience.⁶⁶ Thus, Schelling must show how evil can have a root independent of God, while at the same time retaining the thought that God is the sole root or ground of all beings. Schelling begins to develop this thought by proposing that there is something in God, which God Himself "is" not. As he writes:

Since nothing indeed can be outside of God, this contradiction can only be resolved by things having their ground in that which in God himself is not *He Himself*, that is, in that which is the ground of his existence. If we want to bring this way of being closer to us in human terms, we can say: it is the yearning the eternal One feels to give birth to itself.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ See Heidegger (1985), 102: "Such a dualism of the good and the evil principle is, however, rejected by Schelling because it would lead to a system of the 'self-destruction of reason.' Reason is namely the capability of unity, of the representing of beings as a whole in terms of one—in the unity of beings, where Being itself means as much as unifiedness, a determination of Being which is very old: *on = hen*."

⁶⁷ PU, 31; PI, 28. See Heidegger (1985), 109: "God comes to himself. . . . Thus a becoming God . . . the existing God is this God who is in himself historical. God as the existing one is the absolute God, or God as he himself—in brief: God himself. God considered as the ground of his existence 'is' not yet God truly as he himself. But, still, God 'is' his ground." In his 1917 "Urzelle" to the *Star of Redemption*, Franz Rosenzweig first drew attention to the parallels between Schelling's idea that God gives birth to Himself from a "dark ground" and the Lurianic doctrine of *tsimtsum* (divine contraction). See Rosenzweig, USE, 128; USR, 56–57: "Just as there 'is' a God before all relation, whether to the world or to Himself, and *this* being of God, which is wholly unhypothetical, is the seed-point of the actuality of God, which Schelling . . . calls the 'dark ground,' etc., an interiorization of God, which *precedes* not merely His self-externalization, but rather even His self (as the Lurianic kabbalah teaches)." The doctrine of *tsimtsum*, or God's contraction, is that every act of divine creation requires an act of divine self-limitation. God, who is All, withdraws into Himself in order to create a space for something else to arise. Schelling knew of this doctrine through the works of the Swabian Pietist and Kabbalist Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782), and he was also influenced by kabbalistic teachings through his reading of Jakob Böhme (1575–1624). In a letter from 1802, Schelling asks his parents to send him the works of Oetinger. See SBriefe, 408–409. Oetinger knew well the book *Ez Chaim* of the foremost disciple of Isaac Luria, Chaim Vital. See Oetinger (1977), 133–135. For illuminating recent discussion of the concept of *tsimtsum* in Schelling's works, see Franks (2013); Schulte (2014); and Schulte (1994). See also Cahnman (1994), 189–193; Schulze (1957), 65–99, 143–170, 210–232; and Habermas (1971), 184–200. Horst Fuhrmans and Thomas Buchheim discuss the idea of an original duality in God in connection with the pantheism debate. See Fuhrmans (1954), 219–227; and Buchheim (2011), XIII–XXVI. I will continue to point out in the notes some of the kabbalistic resonances in Schelling's ideas. Only at the end of the chapter will it become important to bring these resonances into the foreground.

We can see that Schelling is entertaining the idea that God is in some sense incomplete or does not fully exist. By characterizing this form of incompleteness as a “yearning to give birth to himself,” Schelling suggests that the incompleteness consists in a lack of actuality or reality; God is in some sense inchoate.⁶⁸ This idea forced Schelling to conceive anew the nature of Being, such that all beings continuously become or produce themselves by making explicit what is implicit in their nature, or by bringing their nature to consciousness.⁶⁹ As Schelling remarks, “The natural philosophy of our time has first advanced in science the distinction between being in so far as it exists and being in so far as it is merely the ground of existence.”⁷⁰ This distinction of ground and existence is what Heidegger calls “the jointure of Being.”⁷¹

In chapter 4, I explained how Fichte reconceives the traditional distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy: on Fichte’s view, that distinction is merely an abstract version of a more important distinction between real and ideal activity, or between action that is merely felt or intuited, and action that is comprehended, by means of a concept. If we keep in mind Fichte’s view that real activity corresponds to everything that has traditionally fallen within the domain of practical philosophy, and that ideal activity corresponds to everything that has traditionally fallen within the domain of theoretical philosophy, we can see how what Heidegger calls “the jointure of Being” maps onto this distinction. Being insofar as it exists corresponds to ideal activity, or it corresponds to what is conceptualized and rendered explicit, and being insofar as it is the ground of existence corresponds to real activity, or it corresponds to action that is merely

⁶⁸ See W. Marx (1984), 65: “God makes himself. And just as certainly as he makes himself, it is certain that he is not something complete and simply present right from the outset; otherwise, he would not need to make himself.” See also Snow (1996), 163: “Schelling does present us with a kind of growth or progressive development from inchoate longing to the emergence of God as fully existent.”

⁶⁹ Schelling develops this idea more fully in his 1810 Stuttgart lectures. See SP, 433.

⁷⁰ PU, 29–30; PI, 27.

⁷¹ Heidegger (1985), 108. See Schulte (1994), 111: “Durch die Trennung Gottes in Grund und Existenz ist die Natur nicht Gott, sondern existiert als göttlicher Grund in Gott. Si ist damit aber vom lebendigen und existierenden, dem offenbaren Gott der Heiligen Schrift verschieden. Gott als Grund ist die Substanz, die Gott als Existenz Subject wird.” Although the concept of divine contraction is implicit in Schelling’s discussion of the distinction between ground and existence in the 1809 *Investigations of Human Freedom*, Schelling first develops the concept in his 1810 *Stuttgart Lectures*. See SP, 428–429: “Passive Einschränkung ist allerdings Unvollkommenheit, relativer Mangel an Kraft; aber sich selbst einschränken, sich einschließen in Einen Punkt, aber diesen auch festhalten mit allen Kräften, nicht ablassen, bis zu einer Welt expandiert ist, dieß ist die höchste Kraft und Vollkommenheit. . . . Kontraktion aber ist der Anfang aller Realität.”

felt or intuited.⁷² Real activity is more fundamental, in the sense that it grounds ideal activity.

In the *Investigations of Human Freedom* and in the *Ages of the World* fragments, Schelling first shows how this distinction of ground and existence is configured in God; then he shows how it is configured in all natural entities and finally in human beings. In doing so, Schelling develops the view that human reason is the vehicle for the self-disclosure of the Absolute, and this view of the end or aim of human reason leads him to reconceive the nature of human freedom and moral agency. As Heidegger remarks, “Freedom can no longer be understood as independence of nature, but must be understood as independence in opposition to God.”⁷³ In these two late works, Schelling conceives moral evil—the decision to regard the incentives of one’s sensuous nature “as of themselves sufficient for the determination of [one’s] power of choice, without minding the moral law”—as the *defiant refusal* to participate in God’s disclosure by turning away from or denying the absolute source of moral knowledge.⁷⁴ Schelling repeatedly compares evil to a form of disease in which an individual organ or body part rebels against the system, the body, in which it belongs: “The most fitting comparison here is offered by disease which, as the disorder having arisen in nature through the misuse of freedom, is the true counterpart of evil or sin. . . . Every particular disease emerges only because that which has its freedom or life only so that it may remain in the whole strives to be for itself.”⁷⁵ By contrast, moral goodness consists in freely accepting that we are at least partly responsible for God’s self-disclosure: it consists in taking one’s place in a relational whole by subordinating our will to the universal will, or to what Schelling in the *Ages of the World* calls wisdom or the universal soul.⁷⁶ As we will see, Schelling’s system

⁷² See Kosch (2006), 98: “Schelling begins with an account of the constitution of things (including persons) in terms of two fundamental principles—a ‘real’ principle (which Schelling also calls the principle of the *ground*), and an ‘ideal’ principle (which Schelling also calls the principle of the understanding, or the intellectual principle). Schelling portrays these two principles in terms of various oppositions in the course of the essay, the most important among them being gravity/light; chaos/order; non-understanding/understanding; and creaturely self-will/universal will. The most enlightening opposition, oddly enough, turns out to be the first, which Schelling takes from his philosophy of nature.”

⁷³ Heidegger (1985), 62.

⁷⁴ RGV, 6:36. We must keep in mind that Schelling’s notion of freedom as rational self-determination does not require that the agent be capable of separating herself from her sensuous nature: it merely requires that she not be *determined* by her sensuous nature. See Kosch (2006), 89. Although Schelling never explicitly uses the term “defiance,” I believe many of the metaphors he uses when he describes evil suggest that notion, including his comparison of evil to a form of disease.

⁷⁵ PU, 38; PI, 34–35.

⁷⁶ W, 297; AW, 72. See Kosch (2006), 89: “The rationalistic, inward-looking character of the idealist approach to moral knowledge was replaced by a view according to which the individual looks outward towards a source of moral value that is revealed (though in a peculiar way) in experience.

is one that provides a comprehensive explanation of human experience by showing how God, human beings, and the natural world interact and affect each other in three temporal dimensions: Creation, Revelation, and Redemption.

In the remainder of this chapter, I mainly wish to clarify how Schelling understood the ethical significance of these three theological categories. In order to avoid losing sight of the philosophical significance of Schelling's metaphysics, it will be important to keep in mind the two main issues that it is meant to address: the problem concerning the incomprehensibility of moral evil if we reduce freedom to rational self-determination, and the demand for an explanation for the relation between subject and object that characterizes human consciousness, or the demand for an explanation for the existence of the finite world.⁷⁷

3. Human Reason as the Site of God's Disclosure: Schelling's Perfectionist Moral Outlook

In the first book of the *Ages of the World*, titled "The Past," Schelling narrates a myth about what precedes Creation and constructs the concept of a living or becoming God. The concept of God includes both unity and duality. Before Creation or God's self-revelation, there is a distinction between what is necessary in God or the nature of God and what is highest in God or freedom in God. By characterizing what is highest in God or freedom in God as that which is "above all Being," or as "the will that wills nothing," Schelling conveys the idea that the highest concept of the Godhead, because it itself is everything, is

Revelation replaced reason as the source of moral norms." I agree with Kosch that Schelling's late views on the source of moral value demand that we conceive human reason anew, but I believe that it is misleading to say that revelation *replaces* reason as the source of moral norms; instead, human reason is perceived as the vehicle for revelation. Thus, an inward-looking approach to moral knowledge isn't replaced by an outward-looking approach, but human reason is conceived within a broader metaphysical framework. It is for this reason that, in chapter 3, I said that the self-consciousness of pure practical reason might be called by different names: we may use the moral law to name this self-consciousness, or we may use the biblical injunction to love God to name the self-consciousness of pure practical reason. See chapter 3, 134.

⁷⁷ See Bowie (1993), 92: "The *Ages of the World* is perhaps best understood as a speculative theory of predication, a theory of why there is truth in the world at all. . . . The identity philosophy fails to answer the question of why the Absolute's self-manifestation should entail privation. In the Christian tradition, which from now on plays an increasing role in Schelling's philosophy, this problem is generally linked to the human freedom to do good or evil. . . . Schelling continues to regard his philosophy as depending upon the demonstration of the identity of the 'real' and 'ideal', but the ontological accent shifts towards the question of how they become split. This split is no longer the continuous transition of the identity philosophy."

entirely indeterminate, so it is indistinguishable from nothingness.⁷⁸ As Slavoj Žižek observes, what this means is that “God qua pure Freedom which has not yet contracted being . . . *stricto sensu*, does not exist.”⁷⁹ If freedom in God is a state of blissful tranquility, the nature of God is not in harmony with itself: it is involved in a necessary contradiction between an anarchic, negating, force of selfhood, and a rational, self-giving force of love, each of which alternately posit their claim to be “that which has being.”⁸⁰ As Žižek also suggests, we can better understand the ideas that Schelling is trying to convey in these passages if we think of what he calls the anarchic, negating force, as God’s freedom or the neutral Will actualizing itself “in the guise of a *Will which actively, effectively wants this ‘nothing,’*” and if we think of what Schelling calls the rational, self-giving force as the Will that “experiences itself as negative and destructive, [and] opposes itself to itself in the guise of its own inherent counterpole, the Will which *wants something.*”⁸¹ Moreover, if we keep in mind Schelling’s view that all beings continuously become or produce themselves by making explicit what is implicit in their nature, or by bringing their nature to consciousness, we can see how

⁷⁸ W, 220–221; AW, 13. As we have seen, the idea that the consistent application of the principle of sufficient reason leads to an All that is One and therefore indistinguishable from Nothing, is the idea that is at the heart of Jacobi’s nihilism complaint. Hegel develops this idea in vol. 1, bk. 1, “The Doctrine of Being,” of his *Science of Logic*. See WL, 43–44; SL, 82: “Being, pure being, without further determination. In its indeterminate immediacy it is equal only to itself. . . . It is pure indeterminateness and emptiness. There is *nothing* to be intuited in it, if one can speak here of intuiting; or, it is only this pure intuiting itself. Just as little is anything to be thought in it, or it is equally only this empty thinking. Being, the indeterminate immediate, is in fact *nothing*, and neither more nor less than *nothing*.” As we will see, though, Schelling will differ from Hegel in thinking that God’s “contraction” of Being is not a logical necessity, but a free act of love. See Bowie (1993), 103–106. In Lurianic Kabbalah, God as He is in Himself, before Creation, is called *En Sof*: the Infinite, He that is without limit. Nothing can be said of God as *En Sof* except that He is above all being and beyond all names. Schulze, Habermas, and Schulte contend that the highest concept of the Godhead in Schelling corresponds to the kabbalistic *En Sof*. See Schulze (1957), 70; Habermas (1971), 189; and Schulte (1994), 112.

⁷⁹ Žižek (1996), 23. See Schelling, SP, 435: “Jedes Ding, um sich zu manifestieren, bedarf etwas, was nicht es selbst ist *sensu stricto*.”

⁸⁰ W, 220; AW, 13.

⁸¹ Žižek (1996), 23. For helpful discussion of Schelling’s conception of the “negating” and “self-giving” forces, see Fuhrmans (1954), 254–256; and Schulze (1957), 148–152. Habermas and Franks clarify the kabbalistic provenance of these ideas. See Habermas (1971), 191: “Ist Gott aber durch diese Herabsetzung und Selbstverschränkung erst einmal der Liebe—und diese Überwindung des göttlichen Egoismus durch die göttliche Liebe ist die Schöpfung.” See also Franks (2013), 18: “The mythic, Lurianic narrative, which focused to an unprecedented extent on what precedes creation, involved the following elements, all of which left their mark on German Idealism. First, the divinity in itself or the infinite (*eyn sof*) was understood as an overwhelming force not only to create but also to destroy. Second, there could be no creation of a finite other and no revelation to a finite other without the self-negation of divine negativity—without withdrawal, contraction or veiling (*tsimtsum*).”

the “anarchic, negating force” and the “rational, self-giving force” correspond to the distinction of ground and existence in what Heidegger calls “the jointure of Being.”⁸²

The internal contradiction within God’s nature comes to an end through the immediate effect of what is highest in God—freedom—on what is necessary in God—nature. In view of the highest—eternal freedom or the will that wills nothing, God as *actus purus*—the necessary contradiction within God’s nature changes into the organic relationship of a totality, in which each part is dependent on a pre-given whole for its being, yet maintains that whole with its being.⁸³ This is because, in view of the standard set by the highest in God or God’s freedom, nature gains continuance and constancy in the form of a progressive actualization of what is highest in God. Schelling calls this ascending movement the *road of life*, or a “Going to God.”⁸⁴ By accepting this organic relationship, God “contracts” Being.⁸⁵ Nature becomes “Being for the pure Godhead,” and God recognizes in nature His own eternal nature.⁸⁶ This unity in duality and duality in unity is what, on Schelling’s view, constitutes *divine individuality*, for as he says: “Were God one and the same with its eternal nature or bound to it, then there would only be unity. Were both outside of and separated from one another, then there would only be duality.”⁸⁷

⁸² Heidegger (1985), 108.

⁸³ W, 241; AW, 29.

⁸⁴ W, 249; AW, 35.

⁸⁵ See Zizek (1996), 22–23. We must be careful to distinguish this “contraction” of being from God’s contraction of being in the act of creating the finite world. Here, nature is still God’s own eternal nature. As we will see below, in the *Ages of the World* fragments, Schelling conceives the creation of the finite world as the actual revelation or externalization of God. Christoph Schulte holds that this first contraction and creation of God’s nature corresponds to the Lurianic idea that the first product of *tsimtsum* is *Adam Kadmon*, the ideal human who embodies all the *sefirot*, or divine attributes. Yet Schulte also claims that, through Oetinger’s influence, Schelling Christianizes this idea: in the *Ages of the World* fragments, the first product of divine contraction is the *Logos*, embodied in Jesus Christ. Schulte (1994), 116–117. See Oetinger (1977), 133–135. See also Schulze (1957), 84; Habermas (1971), 188; and Franks (2013), 19: “The immediate consequence of the divine will to reveal itself was the form to which human beings should aspire. In Neo-Platonism, this form was perfect wisdom. However, in Lurianic thought, it is the supernal human (*adam elyon*) which is, in its immediate version, incapable of stably embodying divine negativity.”

⁸⁶ W, 253; AW, 38.

⁸⁷ W, 269; AW, 49. It is important to note that in the *Ages of the World*, this unity in duality and duality in unity defines God’s concept *before* Creation or God’s self-revelation. In the *Investigations of Human Freedom*, it seems that this unity in duality and duality in unity comes about only *after* Creation or God’s self-revelation. See W. Marx (1984), 69: “Prior to his revelation, God as the ‘eternal oneness’ is, in Schelling’s view, the ‘longing to give birth to himself’ (353). In revealing himself, God takes a first step by excluding ‘that which is dark and unconscious from himself’ and by ‘expelling [that which is subordinate in his essence] from himself’ (473). Thus, within the divine unity arises

So that we don't lose sight of how Schelling's theology and cosmology support his late views on human freedom and moral agency, we must keep in mind how Schelling conceives the nature of wisdom in its relation to moral perfection, a view that he acknowledges is partly indebted to Plato.⁸⁸ Above, I said that nature gains continuance and constancy in the form of a progressive actualization or realization of what is highest in God. Schelling conveys this notion more precisely by saying that what is highest in nature "actualizes the *thoughts* of the universal soul."⁸⁹ These visions or innermost thoughts of God are divine *ideas* that are continuously being generated and that serve as the archetypes for everything that we find in the natural and spiritual or human world.⁹⁰ Wisdom is thus the production of the *ectype*—or copy—by the possibilities beheld in the *archetype*.⁹¹ Schelling explains the relationship between wisdom and moral perfection in the following passage:

The more the soul arises, the more lucidly it sees into that which is above it and knows all of the possibilities contained within it, possibilities that the soul, as an artist at one with her material, seeks to express immediately and to incarnate. For the prototype of all that actually comes to be in a subordinate order is found in the higher order next to it. And, conversely, that which is found in a higher order

an unconscious part of God that is opposed to the consciously 'existent' God and that 'within God is not God himself' (359)."

⁸⁸ As Franks points out, during the Renaissance it became commonplace among kabbalistically inclined Jewish writers to compare Platonic ideas to the kabbalistic *sefirot*, or divine attributes. See Franks (2013), 5. See also Idel (1992), 319–351.

⁸⁹ W, 289; AW, 66.

⁹⁰ W, 290; AW, 67. As Beiser explains, in his 1804 tract *Philosophy and Religion*, Schelling appeals to the Platonic theory of ideas in an effort to explain how the infinite and finite are one in the Absolute, yet he also goes beyond the Platonic theory insofar as he introduces an explanation for the source of the ideas themselves. See Beiser (2002), 574: "In *Philosophie und Religion*, however, Schelling took this theory a step further, introducing an explanation for the source of the ideas themselves. The starting point for his explanation is the self-knowledge of the absolute. In its self-knowledge the absolute subject objectifies itself, and its image or reflection consists in its idea, which is the primal idea (*die Uridee*). Because this idea is an image or reflection of the absolute, whose nature consists in its independence, it takes on an independent status of its own. This independent status of the primal idea gives it freedom from the absolute, some reality in itself. This freedom is the source of the finite world, Schelling says, because the idea too knows itself, and the objects of its reflection, the ectypes of the finite world, also acquire an independent nature."

⁹¹ W, 288; AW, 65. Although I provide a Platonist or Neo-Platonist interpretation of these passages and focus on the idea that the form to which human beings should aspire is the form of the good, it is also possible to provide a kabbalistic interpretation of these passages and hold that the form to which human beings should aspire is the primordial human, *Adam Kadmon*.

only in a prototypical fashion is found in the subordinate order in an actual and ectypal fashion.⁹²

This passage indicates how Schelling's metaphysics revises our understanding of morality: morality consists in each being's attempt to actualize its own natural potential.⁹³ To explain what this means for the human person, I propose that we understand the moral outlook that Schelling develops in the *Investigations of Human Freedom* and in the *Ages of the World* fragments as an instance of what Stanley Cavell calls Moral Perfectionism.⁹⁴

In the introduction to his 1988 Carus lectures, Cavell characterizes Moral Perfectionism as "something like a dimension or tradition of the moral life that spans the course of Western thought and concerns what used to be called the state of one's soul, a dimension that places tremendous burdens on personal relationships and on the possibility or necessity of the transforming of oneself and of one's society."⁹⁵ Cavell considers Plato's account of the soul's ascent toward the idea of the good in book 7 of the *Republic* as one example of a work that can be seen as definitive of perfectionism.⁹⁶ In doing so, he lists some of the features that characterize the perfectionist outlook:

- (1) a mode of conversation, (2) between (older and younger) friends,
- (3) one of whom is intellectually authoritative because (4) his life

⁹² W, 279–280; AW, 59.

⁹³ We have seen that Schelling develops a version of this view on the nature of moral action in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*.

⁹⁴ I draw on Cavell's version of Moral Perfectionism because of its democratic or egalitarian nature. What Cavell calls the Emersonian, or democratic, version of perfectionism moves from the idea "of there being one (call him Socrates) who represents for each of us the height of the journey, to the idea of each of us being representative for each of us—an idea that is a threat as much as an opportunity," Cavell (1996), 361. This Emersonian or democratic version of perfectionism can be contrasted with the more traditional version of perfectionism, for example, the version Thomas Hurka defends in his *Perfectionism*. See Hurka (1993), 3: "This moral theory starts from an account of the good human life, or the intrinsically desirable life. And it characterizes this life in a distinctive way. Certain properties, it says, constitute human nature or are definitive of humanity—they make humans human. The good life, it then says, develops these properties to a high degree or realizes what is central to human nature. Different versions of the theory may disagree about what the relevant properties are and so disagree about the content of the good life. But they share the foundational idea that what is good, ultimately, is the development of human nature." In chapter 3, drawing on Sergio Tenenbaum's work, I argued that we should understand Kant's claim in *Groundwork III* that we cannot act otherwise than under the idea of freedom to mean that we cannot act otherwise than under a certain ideal or standard of perfection, namely, the ideal of being determined by pure practical reason alone. See chapter 3, 140.

⁹⁵ Cavell (1996), 355.

⁹⁶ Because he wishes to regard Moral Perfectionism as an outlook that is embodied and developed in a set of texts, Cavell avoids providing a definition of Moral Perfectionism and instead "opens a genre for definition," Cavell (1996), 358.

is somehow exemplary or representative of a life the other(s) are attracted to, and (5) in the attraction of which the self recognizes itself as enchained, fixated, and (6) feels itself removed from reality, whereupon (7) the self finds that it can turn (convert, revolutionize itself) and (8) a process of education is undertaken, in part through (9) a discussion of education, in which (10) each self is drawn on a journey of ascent to (11) a further state of that self, where (12) the higher is determined not by natural talent but by seeking to know what you are made of and cultivating the thing you are meant to do.⁹⁷

Cavell continues the list, but these features suffice to show why I claim that the *Ages of the World* should also be considered as a work definitive of perfectionism. The transition to the spiritual world that Schelling calls “Going to God” is also a movement of ascent that is brought about by the reciprocal effect of two beings.⁹⁸ As Schelling remarks in the passage I cited above, the ectype, or copy, incarnates or actualizes the possibilities that it beholds in the prototype, possibilities that it could not have known without the other, but which it now regards as its own. Indeed, Schelling regards all of nature as a great chain of being interlocked in an ascending movement from lower to higher potencies, with the last link formed by God’s self-revelation in human reason.⁹⁹ The human intellect is thus the ectype or copy of the divine intellect.¹⁰⁰ Below, we will see why this idea implies that after Creation, the human person becomes the condition of possibility for God’s realization. For the moment, I want to mention some of the other features of a perfectionist outlook that I believe are instantiated in the

⁹⁷ Cavell (1996), 359.

⁹⁸ W, 249; AW, 35.

⁹⁹ See Beiser (2002), 519: “According to his organic view, then, there is no distinction in kind, but only one of degree, between the mind and body. They are different levels of organization and development of the single living force throughout all of nature. The mental is the highest degree of organization and development of the living forces active in matter; and matter is the lowest degree of organization and development of the living forces present in the mind. We can therefore regard mind as highly organized and developed matter, and matter as less organized and developed mind. *Nature is visible mind, and mind is invisible nature, by virtue of their being different stages in the development of living force.*” See also Lovejoy (1976). This idea, too, resonates with kabbalistic teachings. In his posthumously published work *Israel and Humanity*, the Italian rabbi, theologian, philosopher, and Kabbalist Elijah ben Abraham Benamozegh (1822–1900) interprets the Idealist conception of a ladder of being in kabbalistic language: “It is really immaterial whether we start from one side or the other, since the Voice which pronounced the fiat of creation from the highest heavens reverberates from step to step over the entire ladder of being. To borrow the language of the Kabbalists, the ten supreme Sefirot (emanations) recur in all life even down to the most minute creatures,” Benamozegh (1995), 198.

¹⁰⁰ The religious dimension of Schelling’s thought clearly puts pressure on Cavell’s distinctly secular formulations.

Ages of the World, features which both clarify what it means to fail to act morally and show that Moral Perfectionism is not an outlook concerned only with the person's own development, but also with the place of other persons in moral judgment.¹⁰¹

Central to the perfectionist outlook is the view that the process of individuation is one whereby "the self is always attained, as well as *to be* attained"; the self is always beside itself, yet in such a way that "each state of the self is, so to speak final."¹⁰² Thus, the perfectionist author impels us beyond the fixation of our present desires toward a higher, further state of our own self, but he also prevents us from falling into a form of moral despair, by regarding each state of the self as *always attained*, as well as to be attained. If we keep in mind that Schelling conceives "the jointure of Being" as the distinction of ground and existence, and if we keep in mind that, on Schelling's view, each being emerges from itself, and in emerging, reveals itself, we can see that moral failure can take one of two forms: becoming fixated on our sensuous nature so that we are no longer "attracted" to our soul's journey, or regarding with contempt the ground of our own existence, instead of regarding it as the condition that enables us to ascend toward a higher, further state of our own self.¹⁰³ As Andrew Bowie observes:

The activity of "reason," which in itself initially depends upon the ground, can become the (ultimately futile) attempt to overcome that in which it is grounded. . . . Schelling's argument can surely be read, though, as a warning against the potential for domination of subjectivity, which as "evil" tries to obliterate its relationship to the ground upon which it is dependent.¹⁰⁴

Indeed, even on Kant's view, pure practical reason only "restricts self-love," a form of self-regard that Kant believes is naturally active in each of us.¹⁰⁵

For example, in the second *Critique*, Kant claims that "to be happy is necessarily the demand of every rational but finite being and therefore an unavoidable determining ground of its faculty of desire," and in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, he notes that the claim that personal happiness is good naturally arises from self-love: "To incorporate [self-love] into one's maxim is natural . . . for us—dependent as we are on objects of the senses—happiness is

¹⁰¹ For a helpful discussion of this issue in connection with ancient ethical theories more generally, see Annas (1993), part III.

¹⁰² Cavell (1996), 362, 356.

¹⁰³ Cavell (1996), 362. As Cavell points out, this "attraction" to the soul's journey is, in Kantian terms, the categorical imperative.

¹⁰⁴ Bowie (1993), 92.

¹⁰⁵ KrV, 5:73.

by nature the first that we desire and desire unconditionally.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, on Kant’s view, the claim that the end of personal happiness is good can “remain” as the “matter of the maxim” of our will, but in the case of a virtuous will, that matter is “limited” or given the form of a law.¹⁰⁷ This is how Kant describes what follows from giving the claim that the end of personal happiness is good the form of a universal law:

Let the matter be, for example, my own happiness. This, if I attribute it to each (as, in the case of finite beings, I may in fact do), can become an objective practical law only if I include in it the happiness of others. Thus the law to promote the happiness of others arises . . . merely from this: that the form of universality, which reason requires as the condition of giving to a maxim of self-love the objective validity of a law, becomes the determining ground of the pure will.¹⁰⁸

When the maxim of self-love (the claim that the end of personal happiness is good) is given the form of a universal law, what follows is the duty of beneficence, the obligation to promote the happiness of others, and in doing so, to recognize the value of the ends that others pursue, to recognize that they too participate in determining the concept of the good (or at least to recognize that other *virtuous* agents participate in determining the concept of the good). Also, if the claim that one’s own happiness is good is rendered objective by being transformed into a universal law, then others should be prepared to recognize the value of the ends that we pursue; others should be prepared to recognize our own valid contribution to determining the concept of the good. In this way, the moral law becomes the “basis of a definition of the good that can be universally and intersubjectively agreed upon.”¹⁰⁹ When the claims of self-love are given the form of a universal law, they become rational; there is a sufficient reason to realize those ends, and those claims enable us to determine the concept of the good.

Thus, from within a perfectionist outlook, moral failure occurs when a person takes up too much or too little of the space among other persons that belongs to her. As Cavell remarks, the Emersonian, or democratic, version of perfectionism moves from the idea “of there being one (call him Socrates) who represents for each of us the height of the journey, to the idea of each of us being representative for each of us—an idea that is a threat as much as an opportunity.”¹¹⁰ A person can fail to regard her own life as being representative for each of us in

¹⁰⁶ KpV, 5:25. RGV, 6:45–46n.

¹⁰⁷ KpV, 5:34.

¹⁰⁸ KpV, 5:34.

¹⁰⁹ Mariña (2000), 349.

¹¹⁰ Cavell (1996), 361.

one of two ways: I have claimed that being a self involves giving our beliefs and actions the form of a coherent whole, and I have argued that this practice is the means by which the self and cognizes the good.¹¹¹ Yet if a person fails to take her own life seriously enough—by not being committed to her ongoing project or form of life, or by failing to take responsibility for the values that she endorses in living—she will be unable to say that her life contributes toward cognizing the good, for in living she makes no claims about the ends that are and are not worthy of commitment. In Cavell's terms, such a person will be unable to say, "I stand here for humanity."¹¹² Yet, a person can also fail to regard her own life as representative for each of us by considering her own life—and the values that she endorses in living—to be the only adequate representation of humanity. In Kantian terms, this is what occurs when self-love turns into self-conceit, when self-love "makes itself lawgiving and the unconditional practical principle."¹¹³ Or as Stephen Engstrom characterizes the manner in which self-love transforms into self-conceit:

Self-conceit attempts to identify the standard of the objective validity of practical knowledge and practical law with oneself, with one's own capacity to estimate the goodness and worth of things. It usurps the position originally occupied by the moral law, which, as the form of practical knowledge and practical law, is the standard by which the cognitive validity of all practical claims and judgments is to be assessed.¹¹⁴

I mentioned earlier that Schelling frequently compares evil to a form of disease in which an individual organ or body part rebels against the system, the body, in which it belongs. Schelling portrays the transformation of goodness into evil in spatial terms, by saying that the individual body part moves from the center of the system in which it belongs to the periphery, so that if it previously occupied the place of a point within a circle, it now takes up the entire circumference.¹¹⁵ Human beings contract this form of disease when what Schelling calls the universal will is subordinated to the self-will, instead of the other way around: "Selfhood can separate itself from the light; or self-will can strive to be as a particular will that which it only is through identity with the universal will; to be that which it only is, insofar as it remains in the *centrum*."¹¹⁶ We can see

¹¹¹ See chapter 3, 123.

¹¹² Cavell (1996), 361.

¹¹³ KrV, 5:74.

¹¹⁴ Engstrom (2010), 113.

¹¹⁵ PU, 39; PI, 35.

¹¹⁶ PU, 37; PI, 33. See also Kosch (2006), 99: "What distinguishes the 'personality' of the *Freiheitsschrift* from the 'spiritual nature' in the earlier works is that this unity need not be one in which the ideal principle thoroughly subordinates the real principle, in which the light

how the perfectionist outlook employs a similar spatial analogy: when we each take ourselves to be representative for each of us, we are situated at the center of our life among others. This is because if we are aware of the fact that by pursuing certain projects and forms of life we are making claims about the ends that are and are not worthy of commitment, this awareness should renew our sense of responsibility toward the values that we endorse in living. Thus, our life among others places an enormous burden on us, but if we consider that this burden is also the condition that enables us to individuate ourselves, we should regard it as a gift. Still, the fact that we are responsible for the claims that we make—for the values, projects, or forms of life that we affirm—together with the fact that others are always free to challenge our own judgments, can tempt us to move from the center of our life among others to the periphery, where the horizon is unobstructed by their judgment. As Cavell points out, the idea that we are each representative for each of us, is a threat as much as an opportunity.

Against the background of this interpretation of the moral outlook that Schelling develops in the *Investigations of Human Freedom* and in the *Ages of the World* fragments, I would like to explain Schelling's view that human reason is the vehicle for the self-disclosing of the Absolute. If we now consider Schelling's theology and cosmology and ask, "What does our acting morally accomplish?" Or as Michelle Kosch phrases the question: "What, then, is the part human beings are meant to play in the cosmic order?" We know that "they are vehicles for the self-disclosing of the absolute," yet "what ought a vehicle for the self-disclosing of the absolute *do*?" Kosch answers in Aristotelian fashion: "gain knowledge seems the right, the only, answer to this question. But this seems to reduce the sphere of action to that of contemplation."¹¹⁷ I believe that we can agree with Kosch's answer—that what a vehicle for the self-disclosing of the Absolute ought to do is gain knowledge—without saying that Schelling wishes to reduce the sphere of action to that of contemplation. This is because it is only by enacting our values in the natural world and among others that we can gain practical knowledge, discovering by our effects on nature and by other's responses to our actions the ends that we can consistently uphold. Kosch rightly observes that Schelling "cannot specify what the norms we should live by are," but this is because his moral outlook

subordinates the ground. Rather, two sorts of synthesis are possible, one in which the ground is subordinated to the understanding, and one in which the understanding is subordinated to the ground—good and evil." For a helpful discussion of Schelling's conception of evil as the reversal of or opposition to the good, see Fuhrmans (1954), 234, 261. See also Buchheim's discussion of good and evil as two different ways of taking the interests of others into one's own considerations in Buchheim (2011), 8–10.

¹¹⁷ Kosch (2006), 101.

requires that those norms be determined in time, in the course of our lives, and in conversation with others.¹¹⁸

Yet even if we understand why Schelling can only provide an indeterminate moral outlook, we might still be puzzled by the idea that by enacting our values and gaining practical knowledge, we become vehicles for the self-disclosure of the Absolute. Let me elucidate Schelling's view by drawing on some of the ideas that I developed in chapter 3. If we keep in mind that, on Kant's view, cognition always requires concepts and the application of those concepts to actuality via intuition, and if we keep in mind Fichte's employment of the term "intuition" to designate our capacity for immediate self-ascription, we can see that our commitments, the values that we ascribe to ourselves when we form maxims for action, are the means through which abstract concepts of the good are cognized.¹¹⁹ Our commitments are the *site* of reason's revelation. On Schelling's view, this is why the representation of God or the Absolute by finite human beings is a topic of practical philosophy.

Schelling's moral outlook does not imply that "moral agents cannot look to their reason or to some other aspect of their intrinsic nature as a source of norms," but it does demand that agents understand the place of human reason within a broader metaphysical and theological framework.¹²⁰ In the next section, I will explain why Schelling's conception of human reason as the site of reason's revelation provides an answer to his question concerning the existence of the finite world, and I will show how Schelling's moral outlook enables him to explain moral evil as a form of defiance.

4. The Ethical Significance of the Theological Categories: Creation, Revelation, and Redemption

So far I have shown how Schelling's metaphysics frames and supports his late views on the nature of human freedom and moral agency: by gaining practical knowledge through moral action, we become vehicles for the self-disclosing of the Absolute. Yet I have said little specifically about the ethical significance of the theological *categories*. It is worthwhile to remember that the *Ages of the World* is an incomplete work. What we have is the first book, the book of the past, which primarily recounts God's life *before* His Creation or self-revelation. Yet in the *Investigations of Human Freedom*, Schelling had already outlined the movement

¹¹⁸ Kosch (2006), 101. As we will see in chapter 6, this is one of the reasons why Rosenzweig claims that what he calls "new thinking" is a form of philosophizing that requires the passage of time.

¹¹⁹ See chapter 3, 126. See also Franks (2005a), 283–284.

¹²⁰ Kosch (2006), 101.

from Creation, through Revelation, to Redemption.¹²¹ Creation is a free divine decision: in Creation the Godhead severs the organic relationship between His nature and freedom—the relationship that constitutes divine individuality—and resolves “to reveal His highest Self according to times.”¹²² Nature now exists alongside God. As Bowie points out, Schelling repeatedly “uses the example of ‘love’ to explain God’s relationship to nature,” but Schelling’s use of the metaphor of love to explain this relationship differs, for example, from Hegel’s use of the metaphor.¹²³ As Bowie explains, “Hegel uses the metaphor of love to explicate the ‘concept’ (*Begriff*) and its relationship to reality, where the structure [of the love relationship] . . . is such that the one does not experience the other as a limit, but as the condition of possibility of their self-realization.”¹²⁴ If we keep in mind that, for Hegel, the “concept” and “reality” map onto what we have been calling the “real” and “ideal” principles, we can see that Hegel is using the example of love to name a form of reciprocal dependence that explains or makes intelligible the existence of the world. As we will soon see, Schelling also conceives the relationship between God and the created world as one of mutual dependence, but on Schelling’s view, this form of dependence only emerges *after* Creation; God first *makes* Himself dependent by “contracting” being.¹²⁵ Thus, if Creation is an act of love, it isn’t an act that is in the strict sense *required* for God’s realization. As I noted above, the progressive actualization or realization of the ideas is already part of the complete concept of a living God, and divine individuality is already constituted by the unity in duality and duality in unity between God’s nature and God’s freedom. That Creation isn’t required for God’s realization is clear from Schelling’s characterization of love: “For love is neither in indifference nor where opposites are linked which require linkage for [their] Being, but rather . . . this is the secret of love, that it links such things of which each could exist for itself, yet does not and cannot exist without the other.”¹²⁶ How can Schelling say both that the two beings linked in a loving relationship

¹²¹ By arguing that in the *Investigations of Human Freedom* Schelling at least outlines the movement from Creation, through Revelation, and to Redemption, my reading of the essay goes against a long tradition of thinking according to which there is no historicity in the essay. Cf. Habermas (1954).

¹²² W, 307; AW, 80.

¹²³ Bowie (1993), 107.

¹²⁴ Bowie (1993), 108. For Hegel’s discussion of love as a form of reciprocal dependence in which the other is experienced as the condition for the realization of one’s own subjectivity, see the section titled “Conscience. The ‘Beautiful Soul,’ Evil and Its Forgiveness,” in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. See also Pippin (2008), 223.

¹²⁵ As pointed out in section 1 above, on Schelling’s view, the concept of dependence demands the freedom of the dependent.

¹²⁶ PU, 79; PI, 70. Habermas also discusses this passage in connection with the kabbalistic doctrine of *tsimtsum*, or divine contraction, in Habermas (1971), 192.

could exist for themselves, and that they cannot exist without each other? Only if we understand the second “cannot exist” in the sense of a voluntary union, as in a marriage: the two beings could exist for themselves, but they do not wish to do so, and they commit themselves not to do so.

A concept central to the Jewish mystical tradition can help us understand how Schelling conceives God’s love of the created world. One of the three Hebrew words for love, *hesed*, is used to describe a form of disinterested love that derives from strength or abundance.¹²⁷ It is the only form of love that Maimonides attributes to God, and in the *Guide of the Perplexed* he suggests that the act of Creation is the paradigm for this form of disinterested love. Yet in Lurianic Kabbalah, the *En Sof*, or divinity in itself, is conceived as an overwhelming force to create *and* destroy. Thus, the act of Creation must be preceded by the negation of this divine negativity.¹²⁸ This act of divine withdrawal or self-limitation (*tsimtsum*) opens up a space for another to be.¹²⁹ If Schelling, like Hegel, uses the metaphor of love to render intelligible the existence of the finite world, the concept of *tsimtsum* enables us to provide a different sort of answer to the question concerning *why* the finite world exists alongside God: God doesn’t contract being out of need, but through a form of self-restraint that expresses itself in the existence of the human person; God’s contraction of being is the condition of possibility for human individuation. This is the form of explanation that Schelling provides for his question concerning why “the absolute . . . [comes] out of itself and [opposes] to itself a world?”¹³⁰

I mentioned earlier that, on Schelling’s view, God first makes Himself dependent by contracting being. This means that, after Creation, God is partly absent from, *not* fully immanent in nature. His actuality now requires human participation. Let me clarify that thought: in Creation God comes into being or gives birth to Himself through His word, the first utterance of His emergent *logos* or rationality.¹³¹ The immediate effect of His word on primal nature is a division of two principles into the anarchic principle of self-will and the rational,

¹²⁷ Maimonides (1963), part III, chap. 53: “We have already explained in the Commentary that the meaning of *hesed* is excess in whatever matter excess is practiced. In most cases, however, it is applied to excess in beneficence.”

¹²⁸ See Franks (2013), 18. See also Schelling, SP, 439: “Die Unterordnung des göttlichen Egoismus unter die göttliche Liebe ist der Anfang der Creation.”

¹²⁹ See Schochet (1988), 52. See also Habermas (1971), 189–193; and Schulte (1994), 97. In his Stuttgart lectures, Schelling writes that moral action requires the same form of self-restraint that God’s contraction of being requires. See SP, 436: “Wenn also Gott sich in sich selbst geschieden hat, so hat er sich als Seyendes von seinem Seyn geschieden: was eben auch im Menschen der höchste moralische Akt ist.” See also Jean-François Courtine’s discussion of this beautiful passage in Courtine (1990), 230.

¹³⁰ PBDK, 77–78; PLDC, 174–175.

¹³¹ PU, 33; PI, 30. See Benamozegh (1995), 198: “Man is the redeemer of nature. Laboring under the inspiration of the Word, of the Logos incarnate in the Divine Law, he identifies himself

universal principle of the understanding.¹³² The world Soul emerges as the living bond between these two principles, and in each *natural creature* the self-will is subordinate to the will of original understanding. Nature as an ordered cosmos only comes into being when the self-will of each creature endowed with understanding is one with the primal will. Yet Schelling holds that this can only take place through the redemptive activity of human beings. God first reveals Himself through His proclaimed word, and as a Soul or Spirit—when the self-will is subordinate to the universal will—the human being through his or her proclaimed word proclaims unity with nature. This activity restores the natural world, God, and each human being to wholeness.¹³³ As we have already seen, this is because reason is in humankind what wisdom is in God, and through moral action, or by “heeding the light of cognition in one’s conduct,” wisdom is turned into *rational self-knowledge*.¹³⁴ Schelling conveys what is, in his view, the ultimate redemptive end of human activity in the following passage: “God yields the *ideas* that were in him without independent life to selfhood . . . so that, when called to life from the latter, they may be in him once again as independently existing beings.”¹³⁵ Only through this completed morality—which is what Schelling understands by religiosity—can God again “accept nature” and “make it into himself.”¹³⁶ Only then could we say with Spinoza that all things are immanent in God or with Paul in *I Corinthians* that God is “all in all.”¹³⁷ Yet we have seen that, for Schelling, moral evil is precisely the *defiant refusal* to take one’s place in this cosmic order and

with his spiritual part and becomes, in the only acceptable sense, the man-god.” See also Schochet (1988), 94, on how the *sefirah Malchut* is understood as the Word of God.

¹³² We have seen that these two principles correspond to the “real” and “ideal” principles, and we can see how the creation of the finite world recreates the structure of divine individuality, except that after Creation, the human person can break away from its orientation toward God, and in doing so distort both the natural world and divinity itself.

¹³³ In chapter 6, I will explain how Rosenzweig, drawing on Schelling’s work and on kabbalistic thought, understood the idea that human action can restore to wholeness the natural world, God, and each human being.

¹³⁴ PU, 64; PI, 57. PU, 86; PI, 76. See Schulze’s discussion of the kabbalistic identification of the *Logos* with the *sefirah Chochmah*. Schulze (1957), 210–211.

¹³⁵ PU, 76; PI, 67.

¹³⁶ PU, 64; PI, 56–57: “We understand religiosity in the original, practical meaning of the word. It is conscientiousness or that one act in accordance with what one knows and not contradict the light of cognition in one’s conduct. An individual for whom this contradiction is impossible, not in a human, physical, or psychological, but rather in a divine way, is called religious, conscientious, in the highest sense of the word.” PU, 82; PI, 72.

¹³⁷ PU, 75; PI, 66. See also Schelling’s formulation of this idea in his Stuttgart lectures, SP, 433: “Wir können nun zum voraus sagen, daß der ganze Proceß der Welterschöpfung, der noch immerfort der Lebensproceß in Natur und Geschichte—daß dieser eigentlich nichts anders ist, als der Proceß der vollendeten Bewußtwerdung, der vollendeten Personalisierung Gottes.”

participate in divine revelation.¹³⁸ Since moral goodness requires the negation of this form of negativity, it repeats the overcoming of divine egoism by divine love that expresses itself in the existence of the finite world.¹³⁹

Conceiving evil as the refusal to take one's place in the cosmic order enables Schelling to *explain* it as a form of defiance. In the Kantian framework, evil is unintelligible because human reason is not, at least in any straightforward sense, situated within a broader metaphysical and theological framework. Only if we believe that the human person individuates itself in relation to the divine person can we understand evil as a form of defiance, and only then can we understand goodness as a form of love. On Schelling's view, both defiance and love are forms of opposition: the first, against the summons to take up one's proper place, the second, against the temptation to break away from it.¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

Toward the end of the *Investigations of Human Freedom*, Schelling reconsiders the question concerning the relationship between his system and pantheism. He holds that if we understand the dynamic relationship between God, human beings, and the natural world, it is not exactly untrue to say that his system amounts to pantheism, for human freedom depends on God, and through our redemptive activity God again accepts nature into His own being. Yet we must understand Schelling's pantheism precisely in this sense: "Only man is in God and capable of freedom exactly through this Being-in-God. He alone is a being of the *centrum* and, for that reason, he should also remain in the *centrum*. All things are created in it just as God only accepts nature and ties it to himself through man."¹⁴¹ This form of pantheism leaves room both for the divine and human

¹³⁸ Benamozegh drew on Idealist thought, especially Fichte's work, to elucidate the kabbalistic view that human action can repair or distort both the natural world and divinity itself. In *Israel and Humanity*, he describes as follows the effect of action that is contrary to duty: "It is not, therefore, on the universe only that free will acts, but on God Himself (if we may speak in this way), in advancing or impeding the accomplishment of His design. . . . When the human will rebels, it is the part revolting against the whole; it is the kingdom divided against itself (Mt 12:25), for in the Kabbalah, the *Shekhinah* is also called *Malkhut*, kingdom," Benamozegh (1995), 196.

¹³⁹ See Habermas (1971), 193.

¹⁴⁰ See Habermas (1971), 193: "Dies ist der esoterische Sinn der Überwindung des göttlichen Egoismus durch die göttliche Liebe."

¹⁴¹ PU, 82; PI, 72. Paul Franks and Michael Morgan characterize the form of pantheism or monism that Schelling develops in his late philosophy as a "developmental monism." See Paul Franks and Michael Morgan, "From 1914 to 1917," in Franks and Morgan (2000), 33: "Schelling agreed with Jacobi that Spinoza had shown systematic monism to be the only consistent path for philosophy. However, rather than abandoning philosophy, Schelling sought to show that this did not mean that

person, and it provides an explanation for the existence of the finite world, for the condition that brings about the separation between subject and object that characterizes all states of human consciousness. In chapter 6, we will see how Rosenzweig developed Schelling's peculiar pantheism, and we will see that, like Schelling, Rosenzweig develops the view that God is both cognized and partly realized by human action in the world.

philosophy had to be atheistic, fatalistic, or nihilistic. . . . His central idea was that monism could be compatible with theism, freedom, and the existence of finite entities if, unlike Spinoza's, it was a *developmental* monism."

The *Star of Redemption* as a System of Philosophy

*The Human Word as a Response to the Word of God,
and Human Words and Actions as the Means for
the Unification of God*

Once freedom is granted as that which is not capturable in “relations,” thus as that which is not systematizable: *then* freedom can calmly be determined as order, devotion, etc.—provided only it stays in “memory” that it was *previously* freedom pure and simple. And this living *anamnesis* of the concept of freedom in Kant is thus the caravel, upon which we can discover the new world of revelation, if only we have embarked on the harbor of the old logical world.

—Franz Rosenzweig

Rosenzweig’s critique of philosophy’s traditional claims to systematicity explicitly serves to clear the ground for the “true” system of the All, much as Kant lays the groundwork for future metaphysics through a critique of all metaphysics before him.

—Benjamin Pollock

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explained why both Schelling’s *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* and his *Ages of the World* fragments were motivated by an attempt to provide an explanation for the existence of the finite world, for the condition that brings about the relation between subject and object that characterizes all states of human consciousness. We saw that, on Schelling’s view, God does not create the finite world out of need, but through a free act of withdrawal or self-limitation that expresses itself in the existence of the human person. God’s contraction of being is the condition of possibility for human individuation; it is the condition of possibility for human freedom, conceived as love or defiance. We also saw that, on Schelling’s

view, this means that after Creation, God is partly realized by human action in the world. This is because our commitments, the values that we ascribe to ourselves when we form maxims for action, are the means through which abstract concepts of the good are cognized. Our commitments are the site of reason's Revelation. For this reason, the representation of God by finite human beings is, for Schelling, a topic of practical philosophy.

My aim in this chapter is to show that, like Schelling's *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* and his *Ages of the World* fragments, Rosenzweig's the *Star of Redemption* is a work motivated by an attempt to provide an explanation for the relation between subject and object that characterizes all states of human consciousness, and by doing so, enable us to understand and affirm the value of the world and human action in the world. Rosenzweig develops Schelling's peculiar pantheism into a system capable of being pictorially represented in the shape of a star, whose upward-facing triangle is formed by the relations between God, human beings, and the natural world, and whose downward-facing triangle is formed by three temporal relations: Creation, Revelation, and Redemption.¹ I will focus on the relationship between God and human beings in Revelation, and on the relationship between human beings and the world in Redemption. As I will explain, the system Rosenzweig develops in the *Star* invites us to consider the human word as a response to the word of God, and it invites us to consider the connections we make with each other when we speak and act as the means for the unification of God. Throughout this chapter, I will look back to previous chapters and show how the trajectory of Rosenzweig's thought mirrors the trajectory of thought that the book as a whole traverses, and how it helps us understand the practical or existential implications of the ideas I developed in previous chapters.

1. Rosenzweig's Hope

Many readers of the *Star of Redemption* have been misled into thinking that the central aim of the introduction to Rosenzweig's greatest work, and of the *Star* as a whole, is to reject the project of German Idealism. I have characterized that project as an attempt to explain all aspects of human experience by grounding them in an absolute ground, without annihilating the particularity of each being

¹ As I mentioned in a note in the last chapter, Schelling's pantheism can be characterized as a *developmental* monism. On numerous occasions, Rosenzweig traces his main claims in the *Star* to Schelling's *Ages of the World* fragments. See, for example, Rosenzweig, DND, 148; TNT, 121. Rosenzweig had access to a paperback edition of the *Ages of the World* fragments published in 1913 by Reclams Universal Bibliothek. See Mosès (1992), 39.

or the difference between the various kinds of beings.² Toward the end of his 1917 essay “The Earliest System-Program of German Idealism,” Rosenzweig describes the systematic task of philosophy as follows:³

So we truly grasp in our program the moment in the history of philosophy where for the first time knowledge of absolute truth grew together with knowledge of the whole of reality. Being [*das Sein*] and that which is [*das Seiende*] become a single unified problem, branding all enthusiastic philosophizing on that side, and all aphoristic philosophizing on this side as equally unscientific.⁴

In other words, the systematic task of philosophy is to grasp the “whole of reality,” the All, as the expression of a single all-embracing concept—“Being [*das Sein*]”—but also to grasp the particularity of “that which is [*das Seiende*].”⁵ Many readers have misunderstood the central aim of the *Star* because the book is both an attempt to recover the systematic task of philosophy and a critique of previous attempts to undertake that same task. As Benjamin Pollock observes:

What makes it so difficult to keep in mind that the subject of the *Star* is the All, that the goal of the *Star* is to articulate knowledge of the All, is that accompanying the *Star*’s quest for the All is the severest of critiques directed against *what has been taken to be the All* throughout the course of the history of philosophy, and against the *means by which* and the *standpoint out of which* philosophy has sought to grasp the All.⁶

If we wish to understand Rosenzweig’s assertion that the *Star* is “merely a system of philosophy,” we must first clarify his critique of philosophy’s claim to have attained a systematic view of reality.⁷ We can begin by pursuing Pollock’s suggestion that Rosenzweig’s critique is directed against the standpoint out of which philosophy has sought to grasp the All. In light of the main claims that I made in chapters 2, 3, and 4, the idea that philosophy should be undertaken from a certain standpoint should sound familiar. In chapter 2, I claimed that one of the main lessons that Kantians should learn from Maimon’s critique of the Transcendental Deduction is that our ability to make a commitment to a

² For a helpful discussion of the different forms that this misreading of the *Star*’s introduction can take, see Pollock (2009), 122.

³ See chapter 4, 164.

⁴ D&S, 44. My translation.

⁵ See Pollock (2010), 70–72. See also Gibbs (1992), 34: “I present Rosenzweig as heir to Hegelian speculation, even as he announces a turn from the totalizing systems of Hegel and philosophy. . . . His task is to revise logic to allow for the plurality of free individuals.”

⁶ Pollock (2009), 122.

⁷ DND, 140; TNT, 110.

philosophical system—to an entire metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical framework—is the highest expression of human freedom. In chapter 3, I argued that Kant’s moral theory grounds moral obligation in a particular form of commitment: if Kant’s two thought experiments generate in us a feeling of respect for the moral law, this demonstrates that we have adopted the idea or ideal of pure self-determination as the highest norm for our conduct; it demonstrates that we have adopted the *standpoint* of freedom. I also pointed out that the act of adopting this standpoint has the kind of unconditionality that is required in order for something to serve as an explanatory ground. In chapter 4, I showed that this way of explaining moral obligation serves Fichte as a model for explaining experience, understood as all states of consciousness accompanied by a feeling of constraint or necessitation, including cognitive, volitional, and affective states.

In order to show more clearly how the ideas I developed in those three chapters can help us understand the manner in which Rosenzweig adopts the systematic task of philosophy, I would like to turn briefly to a passage from the introduction to Schelling’s *Investigations of Human Freedom*, where I believe Schelling highlights the place of philosophical commitment within a philosophical system:

For this great task [of connecting the concept of freedom with the whole of a worldview] is the unconscious and invisible driving force of all striving for knowledge, from the lowest to the highest; without the contradiction of necessity and freedom not only philosophy but each higher willing of the spirit would sink into the death that is proper to those sciences in which this contradiction has no application.⁸

In this passage, Schelling seems to be using the concept of freedom in two different senses. Before the semicolon, “freedom” seems to mean a specific conception of freedom or moral agency that is articulated within a philosophical system—within the whole of a worldview. After the semicolon, “freedom” seems to mean the absence of determination from which arises the act of philosophical commitment. This is the form of freedom that in chapters 2, 3, and 4 I characterized as the freedom to accept or reject an overall philosophical system or standpoint; we can call it the philosopher’s freedom.⁹

Yet, where in the introduction to the *Star* does Rosenzweig invoke this form of freedom? And where do we find an invitation to adopt a philosophical

⁸ PU, 11; PI, 10–11.

⁹ I would like to thank Daniel Whistler for proposing this reading of the passage from the introduction to Schelling’s *Investigations of Human Freedom*. Thomas Buchheim has also sought to clarify the place of philosophical commitment within Schelling’s *Investigations of Human Freedom*. See Buchheim (2011), 2, 25.

standpoint? Let me propose: in the sentence that opens the introduction to the first volume of the *Star*—"from death, it is from the fear of death that all cognition of the All begins"—and in the sentence that concludes the introduction—"that is why we may *hope*, as did Faust, to find again in this nothing, in this three-fold nothing of knowledge, the All that we had to cut into pieces."¹⁰ 'Disappear into the abyss! I could also say: arise!'"¹¹ The first sentence, I suggest, invokes the absence of determination from which arises the freedom for philosophical commitment. The second sentence serves a role that is comparable to the role of Kant's two thought experiments in the Analytic of the second *Critique*: just as Kant invites us to adopt the idea or ideal of pure self-determination as the highest norm for our conduct, Rosenzweig invites us to adopt the idea or ideal of knowing the All as the highest standard or norm for our philosophizing.¹² The fact that Rosenzweig expresses the task of knowing the All in the form of a hope is interesting, because hope is a kind of other-referring, collaborative agency: if I say that I hope to bring something about, I indicate that it is not fully within my power to realize the object of my will; I indicate that the object of my will can only be realized by a collaboration between my own will and a will (or power) other than my own.¹³ So, by expressing the task of knowing the All in the form of a hope, Rosenzweig suggests that the systematic task of philosophy is a task the philosopher can only aspire to achieve; it suggests that his success largely depends on whether or not his readers also aspire to know the All, and are convinced by the system that Rosenzweig offers them.¹⁴ In a 1917 letter to his cousin and lifelong correspondent Rudolf Ehrenberg, Rosenzweig explains that he no longer regards the systematic task of philosophy as an "objective" requirement for the content of philosophy, but only as a "subjective" requirement for the philosopher as the form of philosophy: "if the 'whole' is no longer the content of the system, then it must be precisely the form of the system; or, in different terms: the totality of the system is no longer objective, but rather subjective."¹⁵

¹⁰ SE, 4; SR, 9. My emphasis. In section 2, I explain why the thought of death that opens the *Star* serves to reveal the *nonidentity* of being and thinking.

¹¹ SE, 24; SR, 29.

¹² See chapter 3.

¹³ See Barney (2015), 176.

¹⁴ I am indebted to Paul Franks for pointing out the importance of the fact that Rosenzweig expresses his philosophical ideal in the form of a hope. Although Franks does not speak about the importance of this fact in connection with the passage from the introduction to the first volume of the *Star* that I cite, he does note the importance of the fact that in the introduction to the second volume of the *Star*, Rosenzweig characterizes the ideal of perfect understanding through a "language of humanity" as a *promise* or *prophecy*. See Franks (2005b), 141–144.

¹⁵ Franks and Morgan (2000), 36. DS, 484–486. To better understand why Rosenzweig says that the systematic task of philosophy, the desire to know the All, is only a subjective requirement for the philosopher as the "form" of philosophy, we also need to understand how Rosenzweig conceives

In chapters 3 and 4, I argued that it is by upholding or ascribing to ourselves certain ideals of perfection, including the perfection of a philosophical task, that we determine ourselves as particular persons. In the 1917 “Urzelle” to the *Star of Redemption*, which was also written as a letter to Rudolf Ehrenberg, Rosenzweig explicitly relates the act of philosophical commitment to the moment in which we awaken to personhood: he speaks of the “recognition of the absoluteness of philosophy and the-existence-of-man-only-in-relation-to-it [philosophy].”¹⁶

Rosenzweig’s claim that the systematic task of philosophy is only a subjective requirement for the philosopher might seem like an admission of his own rational dogmatism. But we can consider it instead as an expression of humility, for we should keep in mind that, even on Kant’s view, metaphysics—the science of the highest causes or principles from which something can be and be known—must “necessarily be dogmatic,” provided that we have undertaken an antecedent critique of pure reason’s capacity.¹⁷ In the passage from the “Urzelle” that serves as the first epigraph to this chapter, Rosenzweig suggests that one of Kant’s greatest accomplishments is his recovery (or remembrance) of a form of freedom—the freedom for philosophical commitment—that lies outside of and enables experience, the system of intelligible relations.¹⁸ On Rosenzweig’s view, this basic Kantian insight is what enables us to leave the harbor of the “old logical world”—where there is no freedom for philosophical commitment—and sail toward “the new world of revelation.”¹⁹ In the second epigraph to this chapter, Pollock clarifies the sense in which Rosenzweig’s project is like Kant’s critical project: the recovery of this form of freedom lays the “groundwork for future metaphysics through a critique of all metaphysics before him.”²⁰ If the two

the relationship between the standpoint of common sense and the standpoint of philosophy. On Rosenzweig’s view, philosophy cannot replace common sense, and common sense must be able to recognize its own implicit assumptions when they have been reconstructed as part of the philosophical system. Like Hegel, Rosenzweig believes that common sense already contains the whole *content* of speculative philosophy, but speculation can help us recover the standpoint of common sense once skeptical challenges have been raised, and it can provide a deeper understanding of our capacities—including our epistemic and moral capacities—by connecting them with the whole of a worldview. For a helpful discussion of Hegel’s conception of the relationship between the standpoint of common sense and the standpoint of philosophy, see Halbig (2005), 274–280.

¹⁶ USE, 129; USR, 59.

¹⁷ KrV, Bxxxvi.

¹⁸ In chapter 2 we saw that, by emphasizing the regulative role of the ideas of pure reason in Kant’s account of empirical cognition, Maimon enables a rereading of the entire argumentative structure of the first *Critique*. On this rereading, Kant’s Transcendental Deduction requires the assumption of an infinite intellect in possession of all of reality as well as the assumption of an identity-in-difference between the human and divine intellect.

¹⁹ USE, 130; USR, 60.

²⁰ Pollock (2009), 124.

sentences that open and close the introduction to the first volume of the *Star* give us the freedom to accept or reject the systematic task of philosophy—the aspiration to explain all aspects of human experience, the desire to meet reason’s demand for unconditioned explanation—we will have to remember our decision as we read further on, since Rosenzweig’s arguments will seem compelling only if we share his hope to find the All in the “threefold nothing of knowledge.”²¹

In the next section, I will show how Rosenzweig’s recovery of the freedom for philosophical commitment is interwoven with his critique of the Western philosophical tradition. My goal is to make it easier for Rosenzweig’s readers to see that the target of his critique is not an attempt to meet reason’s demand for unconditioned explanation, but the *standpoint* out of which that attempt has been undertaken.

2. The Nonidentity of Being and Thinking

In “The New Thinking,” Rosenzweig claims that the first volume of the *Star* is “nothing other than a *reductio ad absurdum* and, at the same time, a rescue of the old philosophy.”²² The presupposition or first premise of the old philosophy that Rosenzweig wishes to reduce to absurdity is the thesis of the identity of being and thinking, or existence and conceivability. In the introduction to the first volume of the *Star*, Rosenzweig states: “In that first sentence of philosophy, ‘All is water,’ the presupposition of the thinkable nature of the world is already there, even if it is only with Parmenides that the identity of being and thinking was asserted.”²³ If we keep in mind the monism-to-nihilism argument I explained in chapters 1 and 4, we can see how a version of the same argument problematizes the thesis of the identity of being and thinking, or existence and conceivability.²⁴

²¹ SE, 24; SR, 29. In section 4, I explain what Rosenzweig means by a “threefold nothing of knowledge.”

²² DND, 142–143; TNT, 114–115.

²³ SE, 13; SR, 18. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle states that Thales is the first philosopher to uphold the view that there must be a first principle from which everything else exists and can be known: “Most of those who first philosophized regarded the material kinds of principles of all things; for that of which things consist, and the first from which things come to be and into which they are finally resolved after destruction (this being the persisting substance of the thing, while the thing changes in its affections), this they say is the element and the principle of things . . . for there must be some nature, either one or more than one, which is preserved and from which the others are generated. . . . Thales, the founder of such philosophy, says that this principle is *Water*,” *Aristotle’s Metaphysics* (1979), A1, 983b7–21.

²⁴ See chapter 4, 152.

The identification of existence and conceivability hinges on the idea that, given the principle of sufficient reason, a thing's existence can involve no brute facts. It follows that if something is conceivable, it exists. (For if both *x* and non-*x* were simultaneously conceivable, then *x*'s existence would involve a brute fact, and this would contradict the principle of sufficient reason.) Let me clarify this point. In "A Rationalist Manifesto," Michael Della Rocca explains Spinoza's argument for the identification of existence and conceivability by focusing on the case of God's existence, and he rightly notes that the argument is a version of the ontological argument.²⁵ Yet, as many commentators have pointed out, one of the main problems with Spinoza's version of the ontological argument is that it only establishes the claim that "*if God exists at all, then he exists necessarily.*"²⁶ Spinoza's argument only establishes that if anything is a substance (and therefore self-caused), then its essence involves its existence.²⁷ As Don Garrett and Martin Lin note, Spinoza seems to think that God necessarily exists because the only cause for the nonexistence of something "is either internal (its nature involves a contradiction) or external (some external cause prevents its existence)."²⁸ Clearly, if the nature of God is His being self-caused, then the cause of His nonexistence cannot be something external. Yet, as Lin rightly notes, in order to establish that God necessarily exists, Spinoza must also show that God's nature does not involve an *internal* contradiction.²⁹ But the monism-to-nihilism argument that I reconstruct in chapters 1 and 4 shows that the concept of God as the single entity (substance) that exists does result in a contradiction (the principle of sufficient reason leads to an "all that is one" and therefore nothing).³⁰

Haven't we just reduced to absurdity the first premise of the old philosophy, namely, the thesis that there is nothing beyond or outside of the All that is One? As Rosenzweig phrases the point, "All cognition of the All has for its presupposition—nothing. For the one and universal cognition of the All, only the one and universal nothing is valid."³¹ Rosenzweig is contesting not only philosophy's notion of the nothing *as negligible* but also philosophy's claim to be the sole presuppositionless science. As he remarks, "With that

²⁵ See Della Rocca (2003), 82–84.

²⁶ See Garrett (1979), 205.

²⁷ See Lin (2007), 274.

²⁸ Lin (2007), 276.

²⁹ Lin (2007), 276.

³⁰ As we saw in chapter 5, in the *Ages of the World* fragments, Schelling develops the idea that the nature of God involves an internal contradiction between an anarchic, negating force of selfhood, and a rational, self-giving force of love; this internal contradiction in God's nature is only resolved through the act of Creation, and through God's entering into relation with the world and with finite beings.

³¹ SE, 5; SR, 11.

‘sole’ presupposition that it presupposes nothing, wasn’t philosophy already itself full of presuppositions, indeed presupposition through and through?”³² In other words, the sole presupposition of the old philosophy is that there is nothing beyond the system of intelligible relations that constitutes the domain of thought: “Philosophizing reason stands on its own feet, it is self-sufficient.”³³ We are now prepared to understand how Rosenzweig’s recovery of the freedom for philosophical commitment is interwoven with his critique of the Western philosophical tradition: what first brings into being the domain of thought is the commitment to a philosophical system.

We are also prepared to better understand why the thought of death that opens the *Star* serves the twofold task of recovery and critique. At first blush, the “nothing” of death that is the starting point of the *Star* seems indistinguishable from the “one and universal nothing,” the nothing *as* nothing, that is the starting point of the old philosophy.³⁴ Yet Rosenzweig invites us to acknowledge that, for each of us, the reality of death is “not what it seems, not nothing, but a pitiless something that cannot be excluded.”³⁵ Death is the erasure of our memories, the conclusion of our particular hopes, the absence of our place in a family, in a relationship, or in a friendship; it borders our life, the domain within which we think and experience, but it is not nothing. By inviting us to acknowledge that death is the “dark presupposition of all life,” Rosenzweig reveals the *interconnection* of being and nothing.³⁶ Thus, as Peter Gordon observes, death serves to reveal the *nonidentity* of being and thinking:

Death serves a more general, methodological purpose in the *Star*. . . . It can function as a kind of wedge to break open the preconceptual facets of all phenomena. At the very least, it names a “something” in being that exceeds reason’s grasp. . . . Death is therefore a sign for any object of reflection that philosophy has missed something crucial at the bare prereflective core of being. The ‘nothing’ thus becomes Rosenzweig’s heuristic for seizing upon this naked existence.³⁷

In chapter 4, we saw that Fichte was led to his conception of the subject that posits itself, of which we are aware pre-reflectively, and which we know by means of an

³² SE, 5; SR, 11.

³³ USE, 126; USR, 52.

³⁴ SE, 5; SR, 11. See Hegel, WL, Erstes Buch; SL, chap. 1.

³⁵ SE, 4–5; SR, 10.

³⁶ SE, 5; SR, 11.

³⁷ Gordon (2005), 168. See also Pollock (2009), 134: “That is, the fear of death reveals what we should perhaps refer to as the interconnection of being and nothing, an interconnection manifest at the level of the particular self, insofar as it is experienced by each individual in the fear of her own death.”

intellectual intuition, by considerations concerning the possibility of explaining consciousness, understood as the domain of representational thought: Fichte's notion of the self-positing subject was designed to address Jacobi's complaint that philosophy fails to provide human reason with a firm place to stand. Although we cannot equate Fichte's notion of the self-positing subject with Rosenzweig's notion of the nothing-something of death, we can point out that both notions name a form of awareness that is not characterized by the reflexive structure of representational thought: each of us is aware of our own death, even if we cannot know it.³⁸ We can also point out that both notions are designed to provide human reason with a firm place to stand; both notions are designed to meet reason's demand for unconditioned explanation. In the next section, I will show how the "something" that exceeds reason's grasp can provide human reason with a firm foundation. Once we have clarified Rosenzweig's critique of "what has been taken to be the All," we can begin to clarify his quest for the All.

3. Revelation as Orientation

That Rosenzweig is concerned to provide human reason with a firm foundation, and that the "something" in being that exceeds reason's grasp can serve as this foundation, is evident from his claim in the "Urzelle" to the *Star* that the concept of Revelation is his "philosophical Archimedean point," the means by which we gain "orientation."³⁹ We will see below that the concept of Revelation has various different senses in the *Star*. It names the "inner conversion" or "opening up to one another" of God, the world, and human beings in relations; it also names the temporal dimension in which the self awakens to personhood by responding to God's commandment of love; and it names a moment of transformative encounter between two persons who participate in acts of neighborly love.⁴⁰ For

³⁸ See Gordon (2005), 170–171.

³⁹ USE, 125; USR, 48. USE, 125; USR, 49.

⁴⁰ SE, 191; SR, 185. SE, 127; SR, 125: "So the authentic notion of Revelation, of the emergence of self, the reciprocal belonging and the meeting of the 'real' elements of the All, God, world, man." See also Pollock (2009), 185: "Revelation, in the broad sense, names for Rosenzweig the opening up of God, world, and human being to each other in relation. . . . To realize the very self that it is, the notion of revelation thus suggests, each element must seek out the completion of its own self in its relation with its others. It must 'go out of itself' and 'come to its others' in order to realize itself." SE, 179; SR, 174: "So, precisely for the sake of its revelatory character, the first Revelation in Creation requires the breaking in of a 'second' Revelation, of a Revelation that is nothing but Revelation, of a Revelation in the stricter sense of the word, or rather in the strictest sense." See also Mosès (1992), 97: "One of the most complex notions in *The Star of Redemption* is that of Revelation. This is due to its ambivalence. On the one hand, Revelation designates a specific relation, that of God to man; and in that guise, it makes up one of the chapters of the second part. On the other hand, it represents the ensemble of the

the moment, we can focus on understanding Rosenzweig's view that Revelation is orientation.

In the "Urzelle" to the *Star*, Rosenzweig explains his notion of Revelation by contrasting it with the notion, which he ascribes to Hegel, that "reason grounds itself."⁴¹ Rosenzweig wants us to acknowledge that reason is grounded on something else: "'in' (or better: 'attached to') reason, there is something extra-rational, something that cannot be encompassed by the [philosophical] concept of truth."⁴² In chapter 1, we saw that, on Jacobi's view, the specter of nihilism comes into view when we commit ourselves without reservation to the principle of sufficient reason and lose sight of the immediate perception of *value* that supports and enables us to build up our reasons.⁴³ We saw that, on Jacobi's view, to accept the skeptic's demand to justify those perceptions that ground all inferentially mediated forms of knowledge is to misunderstand the structure that upholds human reason. Because Jacobi's contemporaries, and initially perhaps Jacobi himself, were encumbered by the view that any form of cognition that is not the product of ratiocination is "faith," and that faith is irrational, it was widely held that his aim was to undermine reason.⁴⁴ In the preface to the second edition of the *Hume* dialogue, Jacobi makes it clear that his aim all along has been to "restore reason in its full measure."⁴⁵ What Jacobi now calls reason, in the proper sense, is an immediate perceptual faculty; what everyone else calls reason, and what Jacobi now calls the understanding, is an inferential faculty of concepts. On Jacobi's view, reason, in the proper sense, is what enables the activity of the understanding.⁴⁶

We saw, too, that late in life Jacobi says he is indebted to Kant for this newly found self-understanding: by elevating reason above the understanding, it was Kant who "finally bound the Protheus" of a false rationalism and enabled us to

movement of conversion through which the three elementary realities accede to manifest existence; in this sense, Revelation constitutes a moment of the system itself and is covered by the whole of the second part of the *Star*. Creation as relation of God to the world; Revelation, in the narrow sense of the word, as relation of God to man; Redemption as reciprocal relation of man to world, are the three particular aspects of an overall process through which the elementary reveals itself, that is, emerges into lived reality." See also Diamond (2005), 113–114: "Our words, one might say, grow, as we make such connections with what others say, and their words grow as they make other connections. Franz Rosenzweig speaks of words of human language as intertwining, as one human being speaks with another, and that person with yet another. We have here an alternative image to Frege's for the idea of a common human understanding: instead of its being seen as dependent on a shared stock of thought, it is seen as involving an intertwining movement of words in human lives."

⁴¹ USE, 127; USR, 54.

⁴² USE, 128; USR, 55–56.

⁴³ See chapter 1, 39.

⁴⁴ DHÜG, 9; DHF, 255.

⁴⁵ 1815 Vorrede, 378; 1815 Preface, 541.

⁴⁶ See chapter 28.

regain orientation in human thought.⁴⁷ In the passage from the “*Urzelle*” cited earlier, Rosenzweig says that what is “attached to reason” cannot be encompassed by the “philosophical concept of truth,” and in the *Star*, he invites us to replace the philosophical concept of truth with the concept of Creation.⁴⁸ Like Jacobi, Rosenzweig is trying to show that the space of reasons that each of us inhabits is conditioned and enabled by our perception of value.⁴⁹

Let me develop that claim. Leora Batnizky has claimed that the structure of the *Star* can be characterized as an extended argument whose aim is to show that “[individual] experience is a condition for logic and that community is a condition for [individual] experience.”⁵⁰ Employing the language that I have been using, the structure of the *Star* can be understood as an extended argument whose aim is to show that the space of reasons that each of us inhabits is conditioned and enabled by our experience of value, and that our experience of value is shaped by the values that are upheld in the communities to which we belong. Batnizky claims that the structure of the *Star* should be characterized as a kind of “hermeneutical argument,” yet if the three books in the *Star*’s second volume reveal the relations of presupposition between logic, individual experience, and community, I believe that we can also characterize the structure of the book as an extended transcendental argument.⁵¹ If we focus on the presuppositional relation between individual experience and logic, or employing Rosenzweig’s own concepts or categories, if we focus on the presuppositional relation between Revelation and Creation, Rosenzweig’s goal is to show that “the *imperative* belongs to Revelation as the *indicative* does to Creation.”⁵² His aim is to demonstrate that our ability to make objective statements about the world is inseparable from the determination of our values.⁵³

This attempt to reveal the interconnection of reason and value is what leads Rosenzweig to replace the philosophical concept of truth with the concept of

⁴⁷ 1815 Vorrede, 380; 1815 Preface, 542.

⁴⁸ SE, 119–120; SR, 117: “In the place of the philosophical concept of truth, therefore, the notion of Creation arises for [theology].”

⁴⁹ As Rosenzweig observes in the introduction to the *Star*, the new philosophers, including Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer, are no longer concerned with the “essence, but with the value of the world.” SE, 9; SR, 14.

⁵⁰ Batnizky (2000), 69.

⁵¹ Batnizky (2000), 69.

⁵² SE, 270; SR, 260. SE, 207; SR, 200.

⁵³ In *Beyond Moral Judgment*, Alice Cray develops a similar view in connection with Wittgenstein’s later philosophy. See Cray (2007), 43: “Within the context of the pragmatic account of language at issue here, learning to speak is inseparable from the adoption of a practical orientation toward the world—specifically, one that bears the imprint of the speaker’s individuality. And since such a practical orientation to the world cannot help but encode a view of what matters most in life or of how best to live, it follows that here there is a significant respect in which learning to speak is inseparable from the development of an individual moral outlook.”

Creation.⁵⁴ In a brilliant analysis of Genesis 1, Rosenzweig notes that God brings the world into being through an affirmation of its value: "One sentence runs through the whole chapter which relates the work in the beginning. A sentence that occurs six times and consists in a single word preceded only by a colon. This sentence is: 'Good!'"⁵⁵ Yet, on Rosenzweig's view, the human word, the human affirmation of value, arises as a response to the word of God: "What man feels in his heart as his own human language is the word that has come from the mouth of God."⁵⁶ In chapter 5, I clarified Schelling's view that practical reason is the vehicle for the self-disclosing of the Absolute: keeping in mind Kant's view that cognition always requires concepts and the application of those concepts to actuality via intuition, and keeping in mind Fichte's employment of the term "intuition" to designate our capacity for immediate self-ascription, we can see that our commitments, the values that we ascribe to ourselves when we form maxims for action, are the means through which abstract concepts of the good are cognized. Our commitments are the site of reason's Revelation. I also noted that this idea helps to explain why, on Schelling's view, the representation of God (or the Absolute) by finite human beings is a topic of practical philosophy.⁵⁷ Rosenzweig's view that the human word, the human affirmation of value, arises as a response to the word of God, builds on Schelling's view. In order to emphasize that the *Star* invites human agents to understand human reason as the means for God's self-disclosure, Rosenzweig distinguishes his rationalism from the rationalism of the old philosophy by calling it a "new theological rationalism."⁵⁸

In the "Urzelle" to the *Star*, Rosenzweig mentions that he was held back from his understanding of Revelation as orientation by an assumption like the assumption that held Jacobi back from his own philosophical self-understanding. Rosenzweig had been able to recognize the conception of Revelation that his friend Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy had developed in their 1916 correspondence:⁵⁹

After revelation there is an actual, no longer relativized Up and Down in nature . . . and an actually fixed Earlier and Later in time. Thus: in

⁵⁴ See Mosès (1992), 80: "Rosenzweig saw his renouncement of the impersonal discourse of traditional philosophy, and this discovery of language as organ of internal knowledge of existence, as his own Copernican revolution."

⁵⁵ SE, 168; SR, 163.

⁵⁶ SE, 168; SR, 163.

⁵⁷ See chapter 5, 205.

⁵⁸ SE, 113; SR, 112. Rosenzweig's view that the human word arises as a response to the word of God should prevent us from taking his conception of the relation between reason and value in a subjectivist direction, as if whatever we value is therefore good. Like Jacobi, Rosenzweig is a realist about value, even though what is of ultimate value can only be manifested by means of human reason.

⁵⁹ Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (1888–1973), a convert from Judaism to Christianity, with whom Rosenzweig corresponded throughout most of his adult life.

‘natural’ space and in natural time the middle is always the point where I simply *am* (ανθρωπος μετρον απαντων); in the revealed space-time world the middle is an immovably fixed point, which I do not displace if I change or move myself: the earth is the middle of the world, and world history lies before and after Christ (θεος και λογος αυτου μετρον απαντων).”⁶⁰

Yet at the time of their correspondence, Rosenzweig had been unable to adopt this conception of Revelation. Why? Rosenzweig explains: “evidently because the place where my cognitive clockwork gets stuck is called ‘1800’ (‘Hegel’ and ‘Goethe,’ namely the absolute self-consciousness of each).”⁶¹ For Rosenzweig, the year 1800 signified the attempt to overcome “the duality of Greek wisdom and Jewish-Christian faith in a single all-comprehending philosophical system.”⁶² The year 1800 meant the pagan identification of reason and being in Hegel’s mature philosophical works.⁶³ As I mentioned earlier, in order to display the interconnection between reason and the individual’s experience of value, the first volume of the *Star* seeks to reduce to absurdity the identification of reason and being. Thus, if “Hegel” meant the absorption of faith by reason and the eradication of the living, existing, philosophizing subject from the system, “Goethe” meant the opposite extreme of poetic particularity. As Rosenzweig notes in the *Star*, Schopenhauer had specified for the content of philosophy “the idea by which an individual mind would react to the impression the world has made on it.”⁶⁴ Along with Schopenhauer, Goethe, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche no longer inquired into the “essence” of the world but instead asked about its “value for man.”⁶⁵ We can see, then, that what held Rosenzweig back from adopting the conception of Revelation as orientation was the assumption that reason had to be divorced from the individual’s particular experience and values.

In the introduction to the second volume of the *Star*, Rosenzweig explains that the concept of Revelation enabled him to move beyond the dialectic of “Hegel” and “Goethe”:

Where can we find this bridge that connects the most extreme subjectivity, we could almost say deaf and blind ipseity, and the luminous

⁶⁰ Greek: Man is the measure of all things. God and His own *Logos* are the measure of all things. USE, 126; USR, 50–51. See Rosenzweig and Rosenstock-Huessy (1971), 118–123.

⁶¹ For a helpful reconstruction of the idea of 1800 as Rosenzweig had developed it in the years before composing the “Urzelle” to the *Star*, see Franks and Morgan (2000), 39–43.

⁶² Franks and Morgan (2000), 40.

⁶³ USE, 126; USR, 50.

⁶⁴ SE, 9; SR, 14.

⁶⁵ SE, 9; SR, 14.

clarity of an unlimited objectivity? . . . That bridge from the most subjective to the most objective is thrown by theology's concept of Revelation.⁶⁶

In sections 5 and 6, I will explain how the concept of Revelation—God's speech to humankind, and the human word as a response to the word of God—enabled Rosenzweig to arrive at a conception of reason along the lines of something like trust: confidence in our ability to understand one another, and openness to being transformed by the ideas and concepts that others employ.⁶⁷ As we will see, this conception of reason connects “the most extreme subjectivity” with the “luminous clarity of an unlimited objectivity.” Yet, before turning to the second volume of the *Star*, where Rosenzweig develops these views, I want to clarify that if Rosenzweig rejects the thesis of the identity of being and thinking, that does not mean that he gives up on his attempt to render all aspects of human experience fully intelligible. Rosenzweig inherits from Schelling the idea that there must be an *ontological ground* for this very nonidentity of being and thinking.

4. The Threefold Nothing of Knowledge

By revealing the nonidentity of being and thinking, Rosenzweig throws down the gauntlet to the “whole venerable brotherhood of philosophers from Ionia to Jena.”⁶⁸ Yet Rosenzweig also makes it clear that he is not relinquishing the project of comprehensive or unconditioned explanation. Instead, he says that he is furthering a line of thought that emerges in Schelling's late philosophy:

⁶⁶ SE, 117–118; SR, 116. See also Gibbs (1992), 39: “If the Hegelian system and its logic and knowledge are exceeded by personal experience, then what can be used to justify one's view? How does personal experience become a resource for social life? Rosenzweig asks whether Nietzschean thought is still science (*Wissenschaft*). He requires more than radical subjectivity. The thought of radical subjectivity disperses into myriads of individual philosophies—or worse, with the fragmentation of the self, into myriads of myriads, as my own subjectivity can then spawn its own myriad of thoughts. Rosenzweig's commitment to philosophy after the end of the traditional project of knowing it all requires the possibility of unity and objectivity.”

⁶⁷ See Rosenzweig and Rosenstock-Huussy (1971), 120: “For self-confidence of reason and trust in speech are both equally essential to a man who wants knowledge.” As Yudit Kornberg Greenberg argues, Rosenzweig's conception of the relationship between reason and language reverses the manner in which that relationship is traditionally understood. See Greenberg (1996), 43, 43n31: “Rosenzweig's theory of language can be seen as parallel to Romantic and mystical approaches in which language is conceived as shaping reason and as the vehicle by which one perceives reality and truth. . . . This orientation to language stands in contrast to that of the idealists, according to whom *reason* dictates language.”

⁶⁸ SR, 18.

“To formulate it very crudely, this non-identity of being and thinking must appear in being and thinking themselves.”⁶⁹ Like Schelling, Rosenzweig wishes to unveil the *ontological ground* of the nonidentity of being and thinking. In chapter 5, we saw that, in his *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, Schelling claims that if we identify primal Being with the will, and if we accept the idealist thought that all natural entities are free or self-determined—what Schelling calls the “formal” concept of freedom—nothing distinguishes human freedom from the freedom of all other entities.⁷⁰ We saw, too, that the capacity for good and evil is what, on Schelling’s view, distinguishes human freedom from the freedom of all other entities. And we saw that in order to explain the reality—the ontological foundation—of evil, Schelling was forced to reconsider the nature of Being and the ground of all beings, God. In the *Investigations of Human Freedom* and the *Ages of the World* fragments, Schelling develops the view that all beings continuously become or produce themselves by making explicit what is implicit in their nature, or by bringing their nature or ground to consciousness or full existence. In these two works, Schelling shows how this distinction of ground and existence is configured in God, in all natural entities, and in human beings.

Drawing on Schelling’s late philosophy, in the first volume of the *Star*, Rosenzweig shows how each of the three “elements of the All”—God, the world, and human beings—is the site of a struggle between a particular nothing and a particular being.⁷¹ As Pollock explains, “While all particular beings are to be grasped as emerging originally from their respective nothings, there are in fact three different ways in which these particular beings do so, depending upon whether these particular beings are human selves, parts of the world, or God.”⁷² Thus, the starting point of the *Star* is a “threefold nothing of knowledge” corresponding to the traditional three sciences of supersensible beings: theology,

⁶⁹ SR, 19.

⁷⁰ As I noted, this is Schelling’s version of Jacobi’s nihilism complaint.

⁷¹ SE, 21; SR, 26. See Gibbs (1992), 40: “Rosenzweig’s greatest philosophical resource for principles of this reconstruction was Schelling.”

⁷² Pollock (2009), 144. Pollock’s clarification of Rosenzweig’s idea that the three elements of the All—God, the world, and human beings—emerge originally from their respective nothings shows why Rosenzweig’s conception of a “definite nothing” should not be confused with Hegel’s conception of determinate negation. For Hegel, determinate negation is the process by which thought makes its contents determinate: by (1) reflecting on a specific category, for instance, “being” or “nothing,” (2) discovering that the meaning of the category involves some form of internal contradiction, and (3) positing a more complex category that sublates that contradiction. For Rosenzweig, the idea that the three elements of the All emerge from their “definite nothing” means that God, the world, and human beings are affected by different forms of incompleteness.

psychology, and cosmology.⁷³ In the first volume of the *Star*, Rosenzweig intends to restore God, human beings, and the world as “irrational” objects, using the prefix *meta* to indicate that each of the “elements of the All” exists in a form that is incomplete or inchoate, before it secures its own being or full existence.⁷⁴ By starting from the threefold nothing of knowledge, Rosenzweig constructs the metaphysical God, the metalogical world, and the metaethical human being. In the first and second volumes of the *Star*, Rosenzweig shows how God, human beings, and the world attempt to secure their being or full existence, first by embarking on two paths from their particular nothing, and ultimately by entering into reciprocal relations with each of the other two kinds of beings, in three interrelated temporal relations—Creation, Revelation, and Redemption.⁷⁵ The system that starts from the “threefold nothing of knowledge” can be pictorially represented in the shape of the star of redemption. As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the upward-facing triangle of

⁷³ See Pollock (2009), 147: “In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant had determined God, world, and the human soul to be ‘nothings’ for human knowledge insofar as he deemed them to be transcendental ideas to which no sensible objects correspond, and insofar as he deemed their objectivization in the history of philosophy to be the result of the improper, transcendent use of reason itself.”

⁷⁴ SE, 21; SR, 26: “We are not intending to restore them as objects of rational science, but precisely the reverse, as ‘irrational’ objects.” Pollock argues that, in the first volume of the *Star*, Rosenzweig employs the prefix *meta* for the metaphysical God, the metalogical world, and the metaethical human being, “to highlight their position outside the boundaries of philosophy’s traditional scope.” Pollock (2009), 145. While this conveys Rosenzweig’s view that we cannot understand God, the world, and human beings by asking the traditional philosophical question concerning the essence of each of these elements, it does not convey his view that each of these elements exists *before* it has (full) being. In articulating this view, Rosenzweig draws on Schelling’s late philosophy. See SE, 19–20; SR, 24–25: “God must have existence before any identity of being and thinking; if a deduction is to be pre-supposed here, then that of being from existence is preferable to that of existence from being, which is attempted over and over again in ontological proofs. With these considerations, we are following the path of Schelling’s late philosophy.”

⁷⁵ These two paths are the negation of nothing and the affirmation of something that is not nothing. Employing Rosenzweig’s formal language, “Yes” designates the path of affirmation and “No” that of negation. Each element attains a measure of stability, securing its being against its particular nothing, when both paths are joined by the conjunction “and.” In addition, the two paths of affirmation and negation correspond to two attributes characteristic of each element. See Pollock (2009), 159: “‘Yes’ always corresponds to a certain quality of ‘substantiality’ or ‘being.’ . . . ‘No’ always corresponds to an ‘active’ quality.” Rosenzweig adopts this formal language from Schelling’s *Ages of the World* fragments. Schelling devotes a large part of the fragments to an account of the dialectical unfolding of the three “potencies” that compose God: the eternal Yes and eternal No, and the unity of both Yes and No. See Schelling, W, 219–234; AW, 12–23. In my contribution to *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern*, I clarify how a human being secures its particular being against its particular nothing by entering into relationship with God and the world. See Nisenbaum (2010), 121–125.

the star is formed by the relations between God, human beings, and the natural world, and the downward-facing triangle of the star is formed by the three temporal relations.⁷⁶

When conveying his view that all particular beings must be grasped as emerging originally from their respective nothings, Rosenzweig not only draws on Schelling's late philosophy, but also on Hermann Cohen's work, which finds in mathematics a new "organon of thinking."⁷⁷ Toward the end of the introduction to the first volume of the *Star*, Rosenzweig alludes to Hermann Cohen's *The Principle of the Infinitesimal Method and Its History* (1883), which explained why the discovery of the differential was so significant for philosophy. As Rosenzweig notes, Cohen's work on the infinitesimal method enables us to understand how "something" can be derived from a "definite nothing," by considering how the relation between infinitely small differences yields an actual number.⁷⁸ Thus, the concept of the differential exemplifies nothing less than a mode of thinking that can help us solve the philosophical and theological problems to which we are led by committing ourselves to the ancient principle "*a nihilo nihil fit*," nothing comes from nothing, the negative formulation of the principle of sufficient reason.⁷⁹ As we saw in chapters 1, 4, and 5, if we commit ourselves without reservation to the principle of sufficient reason, we must also commit ourselves to a monistic metaphysics. We also saw why the commitment to monism annihilates the particularity of all beings, including the ground of all beings, God. We can understand, then, why Rosenzweig says that mathematics provides us with a new "organon" of thinking: Cohen's view

⁷⁶ The shape of the "star" of redemption represents both Rosenzweig's critique of the traditional Aristotelian identification of primary being with a self-sufficient substance and his view that being *qua* being is inherently relational. On Rosenzweig's view, the identification of primary being with a self-sufficient substance leads to impasses and pseudoproblems in all branches of philosophy. Thus, to solve these problems, Rosenzweig first questions the ontological presuppositions of Western metaphysics. For Aristotle's identification of primary being with a self-sufficient substance, see *Aristotle's Metaphysics* (1979).

⁷⁷ SE, 23; SR, 27.

⁷⁸ SE, 22; SR, 27. I have emended Barbara E. Galli's translation, which reads: "For such a movement, from a nothing to its something, science offers itself as a guide: it is itself nothing other than a perpetual derivation *from* a 'something'—and never more than a something, an anything—from the nothing, and not from the empty nothing in general, but always from 'its' nothing, belonging precisely to this something: mathematics." See Pollock (2009), 152. For an excellent discussion of Rosenzweig's use of mathematical concepts to solve the traditional philosophical and theological problem of a *creatio ex nihilo*, see Handelman (2012), 145–161. See also Kant's discussion of the concept of nothing in "On the Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection," KrV, A292.

⁷⁹ See Pollock (2009), 150: "Rosenzweig thus seeks a secure, scientific model through which he can exemplify the possibility of thinking the emergence of the something out of the nothing, through which he can show that the 'promise of determinability' he finds implicit in his 'threefold Nothing' is indeed worthy of trust."

that in the determinate nothing of the differential we can recognize the origin of the something, together with Schelling's view that the nonidentity of being and thinking is grounded in and explained by the incompleteness that affects each kind of being, are the tools that Rosenzweig uses to construct a philosophical system that can meet reason's demand for unconditioned explanation while retaining the particularity of all beings and the three different kinds of beings. In the system that Rosenzweig develops in the *Star*, God, the cosmos, and the human soul, the three objects corresponding to the traditional three sciences of supersensible beings (theology, cosmology, and psychology), serve distinct and indispensable explanatory roles.

In "The New Thinking," Rosenzweig clarifies how his system differs from previous attempts to provide a systematic explanation of human experience:

To know God, world, and man means to know what in these tenses of actuality they do or what happens to them, what they do to each other and what occurs by one another. . . . If we want to comprehend Him, God conceals Himself, the human, our self, closes itself up, and the world becomes a visible riddle. Only in their relations [to each other]—only as creation, revelation, and redemption—do they open themselves up.⁸⁰

In sections 5 and 6, we will see how God, the world, and human beings emerge from their particular "nothing" and secure their own existence by entering into reciprocal relationships.⁸¹ I will focus on the relationship between God and the human self or soul in Revelation and on the relationship between the soul and the world in Redemption.

Before discussing these relationships, I would like to propose a second reason why Rosenzweig turns to Cohen's work on the infinitesimal method at this crucial juncture in the *Star*, when he is still introducing us to his "new thinking." Differential calculus not only exemplifies the possibility of deriving something from a definite nothing; it also entitles us to employ certain ideal concepts in

⁸⁰ DND, 150; TNT, 124.

⁸¹ As I mentioned in chapter 4, as a result of the train of thought that starts with the commitment to the PSR and leads to monism and then to nihilism, Michael Della Rocca proposes to endorse a corollary of the PSR—"Things exist to the extent that those things are intelligible." That corollary enables us to entertain the idea that things come in degrees of reality and intelligibility. In chapter 5, I explained why Jacobi's nihilism complaint forces Schelling to conceive anew the nature of Being, such that all beings continuously become or produce themselves by making explicit what is implicit in their nature, or by bringing their nature to consciousness. Like Schelling, Rosenzweig responds to Jacobi's nihilism complaint by raising anew the question of the meaning of being, by abandoning the traditional Aristotelian identification of primary being with a self-sufficient substance, and by upholding the view that being is inherently relational. See *Aristotle's Metaphysics* (1979), Λ.

order to perform specific scientific or philosophical tasks. In an article explaining Rosenzweig's use of mathematical ideas in the *Star*, Matthew Handelman argues that the differential serves as an ideal concept, "whose usefulness outweighs [its] troubled philosophical justification."⁸² Drawing on Leibniz's correspondence with Varignon, Handelman notes that infinitesimals were traditionally conceived as "helpful rational shortcuts," even though they could not be "fully metaphysically justified as 'real things.'"⁸³ Given that Rosenzweig employs the concept of the differential as an analogue to what, in chapter 5, we called the "jointure of Being" (just as each being emerges from its own particular nothing, the differential exemplifies the possibility of deriving something from a definite nothing), and given the importance of this concept for the task of systematic explanation (like Schelling, Rosenzweig grounds the nonidentity of being and thinking in the incompleteness that affects each being), we must raise the question: "Is it really the case that each being is the site of a struggle between its particular nothing and its particular being?"⁸⁴

Let me rephrase the question as a question concerning the conclusion of a transcendental argument. As we saw in chapter 3, a transcendental argument establishes a claim that is expressed in the form of a conditional statement. In this case, the conditional statement is: "If we are to meet reason's demand for unconditioned explanation, then the non-identity of being and thinking must be grounded in the form of incompleteness that affects God, the world, and human beings." *Quid facti?* Do these conditions in fact hold? In chapter 3, I claimed that the presuppositional relations that a transcendental argument reveals are not only relations between concepts and beliefs, but also relations between concepts and beliefs that we *ascribe to ourselves*. In this case, what we would be ascribing to ourselves would be the ideal of infinite intelligibility or unconditioned explanation. As we have already seen, Rosenzweig ascribes to himself a version of this ideal in the sentence that concludes the introduction to the first volume of the *Star*: "And that is why we may *hope*, as did Faust, to find again in this nothing, in this threefold nothing of knowledge, the All that we had to cut into pieces. 'Disappear into the abyss! I could also say: arise!'"⁸⁵ As I noted above, it is significant that Rosenzweig expresses the task of knowing the All in the form of a hope, because hope is a kind of other-referring, collaborative agency; if we find Rosenzweig's system convincing, that is partly because we have also adopted the task of knowing the All.

⁸² Handelman (2012), 14.

⁸³ Handelman (2012), 14.

⁸⁴ For further clarification of Rosenzweig's appropriation of Cohen's conception of the differential, see Pollock (2009), 149–157.

⁸⁵ SE, 24; SR, 29.

5. Awakening to Personhood by Responding to the Commandment of Love

Thus far, I have argued that the introduction to the first volume of the *Star* serves three purposes. First, Rosenzweig wishes to challenge what he takes to be the traditional philosophical assumption that reason can ground itself. Like Jacobi, Rosenzweig hopes to show that the immediate perception of value is what animates and first enables us to build up the space of reason that each of us inhabits. Because this immediate form of knowledge is something that exceeds reason's grasp, Rosenzweig has revealed the nonidentity of being and thinking. Second, like Schelling, Rosenzweig wishes to explain the nonidentity of being and thinking by grounding it in the particular form of incompleteness that affects God, the world, and human beings. Third, Rosenzweig makes evident his own commitment to the systematic task of philosophy, and he gives us the freedom to decide if we too want to commit ourselves to that task. Like Maimon and Fichte, Rosenzweig considers our commitment to a philosophical system to be the highest expression of human freedom.

Now that we are within the parameters of Rosenzweig's new thinking, we are prepared to understand why the concept of Revelation enabled Rosenzweig to answer the question that I raised at the end of section 3: How can philosophy "keep a firm grip on its new starting point, the subjective and even extremely personal Self . . . while achieving the objectivity of a science?"⁸⁶ As I mentioned in section 1, the concept of Revelation has various different senses in the *Star*; in this section, I will refer to Revelation as the temporal dimension in which the self awakens to personhood by responding to God's commandment of love.

Let me start by clarifying how Rosenzweig understands what it means to open oneself up to God's commandment of love. Leora Batnizky has claimed that, in the *Star*, divine love is not affirming, but judgmental. When I open myself up to the judgment of another by "confessing [my] sins," I turn the judgment of the other into a self-judgment; by turning the judgment of the other into a self-judgment, I transform myself, in the following way:⁸⁷

To dare one's admission of sin into the present is to open oneself up to the love of the other. But to be open to love in the present one must give oneself up to the other's judgment. Love is not affirming, but judgmental. Love is commanding. A new self emerges from this act of

⁸⁶ SE, 117; SR, 116.

⁸⁷ SE, 201–202; SR, 195.

admission of shame in the present. This new self does not become one with the other, but through the other's judgment remakes itself.⁸⁸

I am not certain that "judgmental" is the best term to employ here, nor do I believe that a love that is commanding cannot also be affirming. As Robert Gibbs observes, "Love for [Rosenzweig] is not primarily comforting or compassionate, but rather commanding"; yet this form of love also "affirms and builds up the beloved by demanding love from him or her."⁸⁹ What I want to retain from Batnizky's discussion is the suggestion that the self that opens itself up to receiving the commandment of love remakes itself by substituting the judgment of the other for a self-judgment. Or employing the language of the perfectionist outlook that I characterized in chapter 5, the self that opens itself up to the commandment of love is drawn on a journey of ascent whose point of departure is its attraction to an ideal of perfection, its recognition of imperfection, and its desire to turn, convert, or revolutionize itself.

When Rosenzweig writes that "I" is the "original" or "root word" of Revelation, he makes it clear that he understands Revelation as the moment in which the self awakens to personhood by receiving the commandment to love God. If the world is brought into being by the affirmation of its value—the "root word" of Creation is "good"—the self emerges from its mute enclosure and becomes a soul by answering with its own words the word of God. By confessing its sins, the soul attests to the truth of the standard against which it measures itself; by confessing its sins, the soul evinces the values and ideals that orient its life. For this reason, Rosenzweig holds that the confession of sin is at the same time the confession of faith: "The soul, which confesses its being in the love, attests too with the greatest certitude the being of the lover. All confession of faith has only one content: the one whom I recognized as the lover in my lived experience of being loved—is he. The God of my love is really God."⁹⁰ It is important to notice that Rosenzweig says that the confession of faith attests the *being* of the lover: God's reality or permanent being is partly grounded in the soul's confession of faith. Rosenzweig conveys the idea that God's being or reality partly depends on the soul's confession of faith by alluding to a midrash or commentary on a biblical passage in the name of the master of the Kabbalah: "If you testify to me, then I shall be God, and otherwise not—these are the words that the Master of Kabbalah puts into the mouth of the God of love."⁹¹ The beloved soul's confession of faith confirms the being and the Name of God.

⁸⁸ Batnizky (2000), 161.

⁸⁹ Gibbs (1992), 71.

⁹⁰ SE, 193; SR, 187. SE, 168; SR, 163. SE, 201–202; SR, 195. SE, 202; SR, 196.

⁹¹ SE, 191; SR, 185. See Franks and Morgan (2000), 23n24: "The 'master of the kabbalah' is Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai (2nd century C.E.), to whom was ascribed the kabbalistic work, the *Zohar*, first published in the 13th century." The midrash is on Isaiah 43:12: "I have declared and saved,

There are significant similarities between Rosenzweig's view that the human being confirms God's Name through its confession of faith and Schelling's view that human reason is the vehicle for the self-disclosing of the Absolute.⁹² Both thinkers invite us to understand the place of human reason within a broader metaphysical framework. As Stéphane Mosès clarifies, "The commandment to love God means one must locate oneself in relation to an Absolute."⁹³ On Rosenzweig's view, the "I" first discovers itself "through the question about where it is."⁹⁴ This question is an "appeal to responsibility," for as I argued in chapter 5, if we believe that the values that we endorse when we form maxims for action are the means through which abstract concepts of the good are both cognized and realized—if we believe that our commitments are the site of reason's revelation—this belief should renew our sense of responsibility toward the values that we endorse in living.⁹⁵

There are also important similarities between Rosenzweig's and Schelling's views on the two possible forms of human individuation. In chapter 5, we saw that Schelling conceives moral evil as the defiant refusal to take one's place in the cosmic order and participate in God's Revelation, and we saw why conceiving evil in this way enables Schelling to *explain* it as a form of defiance: only if we believe that the human person individuates herself in relation to the divine person can we understand evil as a form of defiance, and only then can we understand goodness as a form of love. Rosenzweig, too, believes that defiance and love are the two possible forms of human individuation. The self, before it is transformed into a soul, is "turned in on [itself]" in a defiant, mute enclosure.⁹⁶ It becomes a soul in virtue of a transformation in its consciousness or self-understanding: "That which is loved knows that it is borne by the love of the lover."⁹⁷ Rosenzweig characterizes this consciousness of being loved as the

I have proclaimed, and there was no foreign God among you; therefore you are My witness," says the Lord, "that I am God." See also Fackenheim (1968), 39. As I pointed out in a note in chapter 2, in Lurianic Kabbalah, God as He is in Himself, before Creation, is called the *En Sof*: the Infinite, He that is without limit. The act of Creation is conceived as an act of divine contraction or withdrawal (*tsimtsum*), and after Creation the *En Sof* is partly realized through human action in the world. See chapter 2, 104n204.

⁹² Benjamin Pollock and Eric Santner also note these similarities. See Pollock (2009), 209n13, and Santner (2001), 90.

⁹³ Mosès (1992), 131.

⁹⁴ SE, 195; SR, 189.

⁹⁵ Mosès (1992), 108: "Subjectivity is founded by the question 'Where art thou?'—that is, by an appeal to responsibility."

⁹⁶ SE, 186; SR, 180.

⁹⁷ SE, 188; SR, 182.

“love of the beloved,” a form of pride or self-respect that is expressed by what he describes as a form of “humility.”⁹⁸

There is one more thought that needs to be clarified before we can understand why the concept of Revelation enabled Rosenzweig to see how philosophy can achieve the “objectivity of a science” while starting from the “subjective and even extremely personal self.”⁹⁹ Why does Rosenzweig repeatedly say that the self becomes a soul by emerging from its “mute enclosure?”¹⁰⁰ Why does Rosenzweig associate the emergence of personhood with the act of speech? In the “*Urzelle*” to the *Star*, immediately after arguing that “philosophizing reason” cannot ground itself, and immediately after noting that the living, existing person cannot be “philosophically digested,” Rosenzweig calls to mind two biblical figures: Jonah and Abraham.¹⁰¹ The man who is “still there” after philosophizing reason has attempted to “take up everything within itself” is not Jonah, who flees to Tarshish from God’s call to cry out against the wickedness of Nineveh, but Abraham, who pleads with God to spare the city of Sodom if fifty, then forty-five, then thirty, then twenty, and finally ten innocent people are found. Each time before pressing his plea, Abraham acknowledges that he, “dust and ashes,” has “presumed to speak to [his] Lord.”¹⁰² By calling to mind the biblical passage where Abraham learns to speak with God, Rosenzweig conveys the view that we learn to speak by developing an individual moral outlook and emerge to personhood through this form of speech.¹⁰³ Importantly, he also conveys the view that this form of human speech is an answer to God’s speech.

We are now prepared to understand why the concept of Revelation—God’s speech to human kind and the human word as a response to the word of God—can throw a bridge from the most subjective to the most objective.¹⁰⁴ If what it

⁹⁸ SE, 188; SR, 182.

⁹⁹ SE, 117; SR, 116.

¹⁰⁰ SE, 186; SR, 180.

¹⁰¹ USE, 127; USR, 53.

¹⁰² USE, 127; USR, 53. Jonah, 1:1–3: “Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, ‘Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.’ But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.” Genesis 18:27: “And Abraham spoke up and said, ‘Here, pray, I have presumed to speak to my Lord when I am but dust and ashes. Perhaps the fifty innocent will lack five. Would you destroy the whole city for the five?’”

¹⁰³ See Cray (2007), 43. The idea that we learn to speak by developing an individual moral outlook can be seen as a corollary of Rosenzweig’s conception of the interconnection of reason and value: as I explained in section 3, on Rosenzweig’s view, an individual’s words express their overall forms of evaluation—what they find good, beautiful, ugly, shameful, worth pursuing, worthy of praise, etc.

¹⁰⁴ SE, 117; SR, 116.

means to open oneself up to the commandment to love God is to locate oneself in relation to an Absolute, then the most subjective is already oriented by the most objective: when one locates oneself in relation to an Absolute, one understands human reason as the vehicle for the self-disclosing of the Absolute. Employing Rosenzweig's language: "Man has a twofold relation to the Absolute, one where it has him, but still a second one where he has *it*."¹⁰⁵

We have seen that the human being confirms God's Name through its confession of faith, and we have seen that the human self emerges from its mute enclosure and becomes a soul by opening itself to the commandment to love God. Yet Rosenzweig holds that a human being "defined only as an object of divine love" is still "cut off from the whole world and closed in himself."¹⁰⁶ Why does Rosenzweig believe that the human being is still suspended between its particular nothing and its particular being if it remains within the "magic circle" of God's love and the beloved soul?¹⁰⁷ Because the magic circle of God's love and the beloved soul relates to nothing else. Or if it relates to something else, it does so only to deny it; this is how Rosenzweig characterizes the mystic's relation to the world: "To see nothing other than the one track running from God to him and from him to God, [the mystic] must deny the world, and since it will not let itself be denied, he must actually dis-own it."¹⁰⁸ To fully emerge from its particular nothing, the human person must not only individuate herself in relation to the divine person but also in relation to and in contrast with other persons. Employing Rosenzweig's language: "Such an emergence only takes place if the clock of the world moves its hand forward; like before, when God was assuming a figure in moving from Creation to Revelation, the soul now likewise assumes a figure in moving from Revelation to Redemption."¹⁰⁹ The problem that forces us to move beyond theology's concept of Revelation is that even if a person locates herself in relation to an Absolute, even if she trusts that by developing her own moral outlook or point of view she becomes a means for God's Revelation, "there are as many . . . points of view starting with the I as there are I's."¹¹⁰ In other words, we are still confronted with the question concerning how philosophy can aspire to the "luminous clarity of an unlimited objectivity" while starting from the "extreme subjectivity" of the individual's moral outlook or point of view. In the next section, we will see how Rosenzweig addresses this aspect of

¹⁰⁵ USE, 127; USR, 54.

¹⁰⁶ SE, 231; SR, 223.

¹⁰⁷ See section 4, 243.

¹⁰⁸ SE, 231; SR, 223.

¹⁰⁹ SE, 236; SR, 228.

¹¹⁰ SE, 234; SR, 226.

the problem by developing the view that human beings redeem the world by engaging in acts of neighborly love.

6. The Vitalization of Existence through Neighborly Love

How does Rosenzweig understand the idea that human beings redeem the world by engaging in acts of neighborly love? And how does that idea help us understand and affirm the value of the world and human action in the world? Rosenzweig primarily employs two concepts to shed light on his idea of Redemption or the “Kingdom.”¹¹¹ The first is the concept of “life,” or the “vitalization of existence.”¹¹² The second is the concept of a “language of humanity” ruled by “the ideal of perfect understanding.”¹¹³ Rosenzweig describes that ideal in the introduction to the second volume of the *Star*:

For language is truly the wedding gift of the Creator to humanity; and yet at the same time the mutual possession of the children of men, in which each has his particular share and finally the seal of humanity in man. It is whole from the beginning, man became man when he spoke; and all the same there is until this day no language of humanity, on the contrary this will be only at the end. Real language between beginning and end is mutual to all and yet a particular one for each person; it unites and divides at the same time. So real language includes everything, beginning, middle and end; the beginning as his visible and present fulfillment: for language, of which we say that it makes of man a man, is today, in its many figures, his visible distinguishing mark and the end: for also as individual language of today and even as language of the individual, it is ruled by the ideal of perfect understanding, which we envisage in the language of humanity.¹¹⁴

My aim in the remainder of this section is to explicate how acts of neighborly love vitalize or enliven existence, and how acts of neighborly love can move us closer to the ideal of a language of humanity.

Rosenzweig explains how he uses the concept of life by contrasting it with what he calls “mere existence.”¹¹⁵ Wherever we discover life, we discover something

¹¹¹ SE, 251; SR, 242.

¹¹² SE, 250; SR, 241.

¹¹³ SE, 122; SR, 120.

¹¹⁴ SE, 122–123; SR, 120.

¹¹⁵ SE, 248; SR, 239.

that determines itself by developing its own internal nature. Everything that is alive seeks to preserve its own being, and if it determines itself against something else, it determines itself only against death. As Rosenzweig observes:

But what does this being-alive mean, then, as opposed to mere existence? Really only what we have just now already said: the figure that is its very own, forming itself and coming out from within and hence necessarily lasting. . . . Life offers resistance; it resists, that is to say, death. It is this that distinguishes it from mere existence, which is only object, simply there in front of me, and especially for knowledge.¹¹⁶

In chapter 5, we saw that in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, Schelling provides a broad interpretation of the Kantian view that autonomy is development in accordance with one's own rational nature: an entity is self-determining as long as it develops in accordance with its own concept or essence. We saw, too, that in order to explain the possibility of self-determination—determination requires contrast with or opposition against something else—in his *Investigations of Human Freedom*, Schelling calls his earlier conception of freedom the “formal” concept of freedom and reconceives human freedom as the capacity for good and evil. What, on Schelling's view, distinguishes human freedom from the freedom of all other natural entities is the human being's capacity to turn in defiance against its own rational nature. Lastly, we saw that, in the *Investigations of Human Freedom* and the *Ages of the World* fragments, Schelling develops the view that nature as an ordered cosmos only comes into being when the self-will of each creature endowed with understanding is one with the primal will: God first reveals Himself through His proclaimed word, and as a soul or spirit—when the self-will is subordinate to the universal will—the human being through his or her proclaimed word proclaims unity with nature. This redemptive activity restores the natural world, God, and each human being to wholeness.

We can draw on Schelling's conception of the human being's redemptive activity to clarify Rosenzweig's idea that the world must become “fully alive” through acts of neighborly love.¹¹⁷ We saw earlier that the human self is transformed into a beloved soul when it opens itself up to the commandment to love God, and we saw that when a person opens herself up to the commandment to love God, she gains the self-respect required to understand her own reason and moral outlook as the means for God's self-revelation. On Rosenzweig's view, when a person engages in an act of neighborly love, she awakens another self to personhood: she invites the other person to develop her own moral outlook and to situate herself in relation to an Absolute in doing so. As Pollock rightly notes,

¹¹⁶ SE, 248; SR, 238.

¹¹⁷ SE, 249; SR, 240.

an act of neighborly love reenacts God's awakening of the soul: "In turning to his neighbor in love, therefore, the human being would be reenacting in his relation to his neighbor in the world the very loving awakening of the soul which God enacts in revelation and which leads the human being to confirm divine being in faith."¹¹⁸ Rosenzweig conveys the idea that acts of neighborly love reenact God's awakening of the soul in the words that conclude the book on Revelation: "As he loves you, so shall you love."¹¹⁹ By reenacting in his relation to his neighbor the loving awakening of the soul which God enacts in Revelation, the human being turns his neighbor into an equal. As Pollock observes, this is "in order that there be an other outside him capable of recognizing, and thereby confirming, his own being."¹²⁰

In the "Urzelle" to the *Star*, Rosenzweig clarifies his conception of Redemption by stating that the self that awakens to subjectivity or personhood by responding to God's call—the person who "can say I"—works to awaken to subjectivity everything that relates to itself as an object or "in the form of the third person."¹²¹ Employing Rosenzweig's formal language, through acts of neighborly love, everything that is "B=A," everything that does not yet "recognize its dependence" on the Absolute "A," is transformed into "B=B," in recognition of its dependence on "A=A":

But in the instant where B=B is at an end with this work, thus where all B=A has become B=B, and precisely because B=B has become 'everything,' it has lost its peculiar essence of being something that is buried in itself and undeveloped. There is no longer any being over against God: God is one and all.¹²²

Because only the self that has awakened to personhood can summon another self to personhood, the commandment to love one's neighbor presupposes the commandment to love God. As Rosenzweig remarks, "Only the soul loved by God can receive the commandment of neighborly love so far as to fulfill it. God must first have turned toward man before man can be converted to God's will."¹²³ We can see, then, how acts of neighborly love differ from moral acts: if moral acts presuppose nothing other than the freedom of the will, acts of neighborly love

¹¹⁸ Pollock (2009), 220.

¹¹⁹ SE, 228; SR, 220.

¹²⁰ Pollock (2009), 220.

¹²¹ USE, 130; USR, 60.

¹²² USE, 136; USR, 66.

¹²³ As I mentioned in section 5 above, on Rosenzweig's view, what it means to be loved by God is to be open to the commandment to love God—to awaken to personhood by determining what we value, and to see the determination of our values and commitments as the means for the revelation of God. SE, 239–240; SR, 231.

presuppose the “oriented will.”¹²⁴ Such acts of neighborly love vitalize or enliven the world, because when the self becomes a soul, its will is oriented in relation to, rather than in opposition to, the will of God; nature as a whole is transformed into a single organism, and everything is seen as the expression of a single living force that is the cause and effect of itself.¹²⁵ Through acts of neighborly love, the natural world, God, and each human being are restored to wholeness.

In addition to the ideal of a world become “fully alive,” why does Rosenzweig postulate the ideal of a “language of humanity”? What is the problem that the ideal of a language of humanity is meant to solve, and how can acts of neighborly love move us closer to that ideal? In section 5, I claimed that Rosenzweig relates the emergence of personhood to the act of speech because he holds that we learn to speak by developing an individual moral outlook, and because developing an individual moral outlook is what being a person involves. Yet there are occasions when another person’s words, and the moral outlook they express, fail to make any sense to us. On such occasions, an unbridgeable gulf opens up between us. In Rosenzweig’s words, instead of a single world that has become “fully alive,” there seem to be “several centers of life, like raisins in a cake.”¹²⁶ Rosenzweig is struggling to explain how we can uphold the idea that there is a common human understanding once our starting point is the “subjective and even extremely personal Self,” especially in those moments when it seems impossible to understand one another.¹²⁷

In section 3, I mentioned that in addition to naming the temporal dimension in which the self awakens to personhood by responding to God’s commandment of love, the concept of Revelation also names a moment of transformative encounter between two persons engaging in acts of neighborly love. I now want to show how this sense of Revelation can help us throw a bridge from one center of life to another. Or employing Rosenzweig’s language, I want to show how this sense of Revelation can help us move from a world in which there are various “centers of life,” to a world that has become “fully alive.”¹²⁸ To do so, I will contend that there are important similarities between Rosenzweig’s and Wittgenstein’s views on what is required for a common human understanding, unity of reason, or kind of “singleness” in human language.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ SE, 239; SR, 230.

¹²⁵ As I noted in chapter 5, the idea that nature as a whole can be conceived of as an organism is one of the central ideas of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*. See chapter 5, 180.

¹²⁶ SE, 249; SR, 240.

¹²⁷ SE, 117; SR, 116.

¹²⁸ SE, 249; SR, 240.

¹²⁹ In the 1938 lectures on religious belief and in *On Certainty*. Diamond (2005), 114.

In an article on Wittgenstein's 1938 lectures on religious belief, the philosopher Cora Diamond surprisingly draws on Rosenzweig's idea of a movement of languages toward a unity of language to explicate why, in an exchange with his student Casmir Lewy, Wittgenstein says that the accusation that he is "trying to undermine reason" isn't false.¹³⁰ In an essay responding to Diamond, Paul Franks clarifies the context in which the accusation is made:

Someone, perhaps Lewy, is imagined to say that a dead friend is alive and will be seen again. To Wittgenstein, "Seeing a dead friend . . . means nothing much . . . at all"; he doesn't "think in these terms." . . . Wittgenstein neither goes along with talk of the dead being alive, nor does he contradict it. Faced with this situation, some people—such as Lewy and Moore—will insist that there must be some "knowledge," the lack of which explains this incapacity to agree or contradict, and the acquisition of which would enable the two sides to "come together." The "knowledge" might be *either* semantic *or* empirical. It will be semantic if Wittgenstein lacks knowledge of the non-literal way in which the one who says his dead friend is alive is using the word "alive." It will be empirical if the word "alive" is being used literally, but both parties lack knowledge of some eventual experience that would confirm or fail to confirm that the friend is alive. However, Wittgenstein rejects the idea that there must be some such lack of knowledge, whether semantic or empirical, repairing which would enable him to "come together" with the person who says his dead friend is alive.¹³¹

If there is no semantic or empirical knowledge that Wittgenstein could gain which would enable him either to agree with or contradict the person who speaks of the dead being seen again, then it seems that Wittgenstein is trying to undermine reason; or it seems that Wittgenstein is giving up on the idea that he and the person who speaks in this way share a common human understanding.¹³² As Diamond contends, this seems to be the case because we have inherited a philosophical conception of reason that leads us to think of our common human understanding as depending on a "shared stock of thoughts" or on a "shared logical

¹³⁰ Wittgenstein (1966), 64. See also Diamond (2005) and Franks (2005b), 139–142.

¹³¹ Franks (2005b), 140.

¹³² Alice Crary argues that there is a similar way of interpreting, or misinterpreting, Wittgenstein's claims in *On Certainty* that there are cases when we fail to make sense of another person's utterances, and that in such cases we "discover the judgments that stand fast for us." See Wittgenstein (1972), §§140–144. Crary contends that we shouldn't understand Wittgenstein's claim to mean that such judgments are inviolable, but that if such judgments are subject to revision, they are subject to revision by something like a method of *persuasion*. Moreover, she argues that this form of persuasion should *not* be understood as a *nonrational* method. See Crary (2007), 109–119.

space.”¹³³ If language opens up the space within which we reason, then it also seems that Wittgenstein is giving up on the idea that there is a kind of singleness in human language.¹³⁴

To open up a third road at this crossroads—either there is some semantic or empirical knowledge that Wittgenstein could gain, which would enable him either to agree with or contradict his friend, or Wittgenstein is undermining reason—Diamond offers Rosenzweig’s idea of a movement of languages toward a unity of language. As Diamond conveys the idea: “Our words, one might say, grow, as we make such connections with what others say, and their words grow as they make other connections. Franz Rosenzweig speaks of words of human languages as intertwining, as one human being speaks with another, and that person with yet another.”¹³⁵ Rosenzweig’s idea of a movement of languages toward a unity of language offers us a particular conception of how to reason with another person: to reason with another person is not to seek some semantic or empirical knowledge that would enable us to make sense of the other’s words, but to be open to the possibility that our own words might be transformed by the other’s words and form of life, both of which express the other’s values and moral outlook. Diamond provides an example of the sort of transformative encounter she has in mind:

Thus, one might, for example, meet George Eliot, and find oneself, during the encounter, recognizing her to be beautiful, but not beautiful as one had understood what beauty was. She, that magnificently ugly woman, gives a totally transformed meaning to “beauty.” Beauty itself becomes something entirely new for one, as one comes to see (to one’s own amazement, perhaps) a powerful beauty residing in this woman.

¹³³ Diamond attributes this philosophical conception of reason to Frege and to Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*. Diamond (2005), 100–108, 114.

¹³⁴ See Franks (2005b), 141: “[Diamond’s] point is just that Wittgenstein’s insistence—that there are cases in which, for no semantic or epistemic reason, one person simply cannot take up a position with respect to another’s assertion—is not *incompatible* with that feature of some philosophical conception of reason. . . . It may be useful, for some purposes, to picture sharing a common intellectual life as sharing a single logical space, or as sharing a stock of semantic units plus some compositional rules. But these are *dispensable* pictures of the common intellectual life of mankind, and we should not be seduced into thinking that because Wittgenstein’s inability to contradict the person who believes his dead friend is alive is incompatible with the pictures, his inability must therefore be incompatible with the idea of a common intellectual life. One sees that the spatial and compositional pictures are dispensable when one sees that there is at least one alternative picture, and Diamond finds an alternative in Rosenzweig’s idea “of words of human languages as intertwining, as one human being speaks with another, and that person with yet another . . . constituting a movement of languages towards a kind of unity of language.”

¹³⁵ Diamond (2005), 113–114.

She has done something, something that one could not at all have predicted, to the concept of beauty.¹³⁶

Our application of the concept “beauty” to George Eliot—with her large, protruding nose and drooping eyebrows—is not justified by previous practice. Yet it won’t help, if we want to explain or teach our use of the concept to another person, to offer different words that convey the nonliteral sense in which we are using the concept “beauty.” We cannot simply offer this form of semantic knowledge and bypass the encounter with Eliot; the other person must take up the standpoint from which she would be able to see if the concept “beauty” has been transformed by what Eliot *does* to the concept.¹³⁷

Diamond argues that this example of a concept being transformed through a particular encounter can help us understand Rosenzweig’s idea that God gives Himself in Revelation, and that Revelation “involves the ‘inner conversion’ of our former concepts.”¹³⁸ In the transition from the first to the second volume of the *Star*, Rosenzweig says that Revelation, in the broad sense, names the entire movement of “conversion” through which the three elementary realities—God, the world, and man—emerge to manifest existence: “That which flowed together on the inside as Yes will radiate as No, that which had entered as No will come out as Yes. For becoming-manifest is the conversion of becoming.”¹³⁹ I am not certain that Diamond’s example of the conversion of the concept of beauty through the encounter with Eliot helps us understand Revelation in this broad sense, as the opening up of God, world, and human beings to each other in relation. Yet I do believe that it helps us understand the soul’s inner conversion or emergence to manifest existence in the movement from Revelation to Redemption, when the soul engages in acts of neighborly love.¹⁴⁰

Earlier, we saw that when the self awakens to personhood by opening itself up to the commandment to love God, the person’s will is oriented in relation to an Absolute: “Man, who is one day possessed by his daimon, has received a ‘direction’ for his entire life. His will is now determined to go in this direction that orients him once and for all.”¹⁴¹ When a person’s will is oriented in

¹³⁶ Diamond (2005), 125.

¹³⁷ See Franks’s discussion of secondary sense and Rabbinic anthropomorphisms, in Franks (2005b), 145–155.

¹³⁸ Diamond (2005), 125.

¹³⁹ SE, 97; SR, 98.

¹⁴⁰ SE, 236; SR, 227–228: “So a new force must arise from the depths of the soul in order to give it, in the fervor of the saint, its solidity and its configuration that it risked losing in its mystical ardor. But such an emergence only takes place if the clock of the world moves its hand forward; like before, when God was assuming a figure in moving from Creation to Revelation, the soul now likewise assumes a figure in moving from Revelation to Redemption.”

¹⁴¹ SE, 237–238; SR, 229.

relation to an Absolute, she understands her own words, which express her values and moral outlook, as a response to the word of God, as a vehicle for the manifestation of God. Yet Rosenzweig holds that the movement from Revelation to Redemption—the movement that enables the soul to accede to manifest existence—requires the conversion or “inner reversal” of the oriented will: “but now the will of a direction remains just that; yet it is no longer established once and for all, at every moment it dies and is renewed.”¹⁴² To love one’s neighbor, Rosenzweig suggests, is to be open to an unforeseen renewal of one’s most basic orientation: it is to be open to the renewal of one’s orientation in relation to an Absolute. How can Diamond’s example of the transformation of the concept of beauty through the particular encounter with Eliot help us understand this kind of renewed orientation? Diamond first introduces an example to explain the believer’s insistence on God’s having a Name. Her claim is that the importance of the Name of God is connected to the idea that our understanding of God cannot be conveyed in general conceptual terms, but only in terms that convey His *doings*: “What we know of what this God is like comes from his doings, which stand in a relation to our independent conceptual grasp of *divinity* in something like the way in which meeting George Eliot might stand to our prior independent conceptual grasp of *beauty*.”¹⁴³ Just as Eliot, through her presence, gives a transformed content to the concept “beauty,” God, through His actions, gives a transformed content to the concept “divinity.” The action in question here is God’s making Himself known to us through His revealed Name, which as we have seen, is confirmed through the soul’s confession of sin: because the soul’s confession of sin attests to the standard against which it measures itself, it is already a confession of faith. What it would mean, then, to open oneself up to the renewal of one’s most basic orientation by engaging in acts of neighborly love, would be to open oneself up to the other’s encounter with God, an encounter that the other expresses in the Name that she employs in her confession of faith: in the values and ideals against which she measures herself.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² SE, 238; SR, 229. See Mosès (1992), 130: “In other words, the total man is the one who awakens at once in Revelation, and who at the same time, is capable of saying no to the substance of his identity.” See also Pollock (2009), 216: “From a character which fixed the identity of the human being ‘once and for all,’ the human being’s character reverses itself into a transformative force which extinguishes itself and creates itself anew in every moment through ‘self-negation,’ through a negation of the very fixed, ‘once and for all’ character out of which it emerges.”

¹⁴³ Diamond (2005), 125.

¹⁴⁴ See Rosenzweig’s discussion of anthropomorphic terms in “On Anthropomorphisms,” in Rosenzweig (1988), 138: “Theological experiences, as long as they are genuine experiences and not phantoms, have just this much in common: they are experiences of meetings, not experiences of an objective kind like experiences of the world, not a mixture of both, like experiences between human beings. . . . The ‘anthropomorphisms’ of the Bible are throughout assertions about meetings between

Yet, as Rosenzweig cautions, we cannot know in advance whether or how an act of neighborly love will renew our most basic orientation: "What [the act of neighborly love] consists of in the particular case cannot be told in advance for precisely this reason; it must be unforeseen; if it could be pointed out in advance, this would not be an act of love."¹⁴⁵

To close this section, let me clarify both how acts of neighborly love can move us closer to the ideal of achieving a language of humanity and how Rosenzweig understood that ideal. If we accept Rosenzweig's view that we learn to speak by developing a moral outlook—by orienting ourselves in relation to an Absolute—and if by engaging in acts of neighborly love we open ourselves up to the renewal of our most basic orientation (to the transformation of our values and ideals, which disclose to us a meaningful world), then such acts of neighborly love could potentially enable us to inhabit a worldview in which assertions such as "a dead friend is alive and will be seen again," would be meaningful. By engaging in acts of neighborly love, we open ourselves up to encounters that can transform and renew our concepts, including our concepts of life and death, and including the Name that we use to express our encounter with and experience of God. Such transformative encounters confirm or verify the other's experience of Revelation, throwing a bridge from one center of life to another. As Gibbs notes, "The wandering of the dual, from one neighbor to the next, when I discover again and again that both I and this other are ready to come together, that wandering generates a fuller 'we,' a 'we' that can collect all of us and more."¹⁴⁶ Nonetheless, Rosenzweig acknowledges that there are encounters in which two people fail to come together. Such encounters do not result in the confirmation or verification of the other's experience of Revelation. Instead, they result in mutual judgment. Such encounters do not generate a fuller "we." Instead, they give the community of the "we" its definite content by excluding from its own sphere what it cannot reach and grasp.¹⁴⁷

Because Rosenzweig believed that each person is shaped by and shapes the community to which he or she belongs, he understood that moments of

God and man." See also Franks's discussion of this essay in Franks, "Talking of Eyebrows" (2005b), 145–155.

¹⁴⁵ SE, 241; SR, 232.

¹⁴⁶ SE, 119; SR, 117: "But truth cannot be denied, not even in the name of the ideal, let alone in the name of lived experience. Truth is and remains the solid ground on which alone authentic experience can grow, where alone the ideal can be verified. The miracle of personal experience of Revelation may be strengthened, for the will, in the certitude of its future confirmation through Redemption." See also Pollock (2009), 220: "The elemental self fulfills its promise, is able to be itself as self, only when its 'being in the particular' is recognized by others—others whom the self awakens to their own speaking selfhood through love." Gibbs (1992), 78.

¹⁴⁷ SE, 264; SR, 255–256.

transformative encounter affect both the two persons who participate in the encounter and their communities as a whole. Considering that, on Rosenzweig's view, a community comes together through a performative recognition of a common conception of the good, we can see how these moments of transformative encounter have the potential to bring about a universal community under a common conception of the good. Rosenzweig understood the religious community's prayer for the coming of the Kingdom of God as a prayer for this form of community: "The universally shared recognition of God's fatherly goodness is the foundation on which all communal prayer rises up."¹⁴⁸

Yet he also held deep reservations about the attempt to establish such a community. The idea that Revelation names a moment of transformative encounter between two persons and the communities to which they belong was the result of Rosenzweig's effort to understand the place of Judaism within the modern nation-state, a question that preoccupied him in his dissertation on Hegel, in his 1916 wartime correspondence with Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy on Christianity and Judaism, and in the *Star*. If the central idea of the modern nation-state is the idea that the state is coterminous with an ethnic community and represents the deepest aspirations and general will of its people, Rosenzweig came to view the Jewish people's creation of a community governed by its own calendar and laws as a "mute reminder" of the fact that, in practice, the state is superimposed on multiethnic societies, obliging the government of the nation-state to heed the superficially democratic will of all.¹⁴⁹ If we understand Revelation as a moment of transformative encounter between two persons and the communities to which they belong, then that idea enables us to acknowledge the diversity of interests, convictions, and values among different communities but retain as a *postulate* (not as something that has already happened) the ideal of a language of humanity or universal community under a common conception of the good.¹⁵⁰ In the third volume of the *Star*, Rosenzweig argues that Christianity and Judaism

¹⁴⁸ See SE, 258; SR, 249: "One does not sing together in view of a specific content, but rather one seeks a common content in order to be able to sing together. . . . What is it that is established first? It can only be the community of the song, and this community not as a *fait accompli*, not as an indicative, but as a fact established at the moment. So the foundation of the community must precede the content of the song, as an invitation, that is, to sing together, to give thanks, to confess that 'he is good.'" By "performative" I mean a self-instantiating locution in the Austinian sense. See Austin (1975). SE, 260; SR, 251.

¹⁴⁹ See Rosenzweig and Rosenstock-Huessy (1971), 135: "We are to you the ever-mindful memorial of your incompleteness (for you who live in a church triumphant need a mute servant who cries when you have partaken of God's bread and wine, Master, remember the last things." For a helpful discussion of Rosenzweig's views on the modern nation-state, see Mendes-Flohr (1998), 147–155.

¹⁵⁰ See Brenner (1996).

play two distinct but complementary roles in striving toward, yet retaining only as a postulate, the ideal of a language of humanity.¹⁵¹

7. Confessing God's Oneness

We have seen that, in order to emphasize the interconnection between reason and value, Rosenzweig invites us to replace the philosophical concept of truth with the concept of Creation. Truth, Rosenzweig contends, is always "truth for someone."¹⁵² Yet we have also seen that Rosenzweig does not wish to abandon the idea of a common human understanding or kind of singleness in human language. In the "New Thinking," Rosenzweig brings these two requirements together by arguing that if truth "can only be one," but must also always be "for someone," then it "can be only for the One."¹⁵³ Rosenzweig also joins these two conditions in the concluding book of the *Star*, entitled "The Star or Eternal Truth," where Redemption is pictured as God's freedom from His revealed Name:

Redemption redeems God because it frees him from his revealed Name. . . . Where other names no longer throw themselves opposite the one Name, where the one Name is all-one and everything created knows and confesses it and only it, there the work of the sanctification has come to rest. . . . The one name "One" outlives the people that confess it.¹⁵⁴

Considering that the soul's confession of faith expresses the standards against which it measures itself, its highest values, what it would mean for everything created to confess the one name "One" would be to arrive at a common conception of the good or to a shared understanding of our highest values.

Let me explain more fully the idea that Redemption redeems God. In chapter 5, we saw that, in the *Ages of the World* fragments, Schelling conceives Creation as an act of divine withdrawal or self-limitation: God makes Himself dependent by "contracting" being. In an effort to elucidate Schelling's understanding of God's "contraction" of being, I mentioned some of the parallels between that idea and the Lurianic doctrine of *tsimtsum*, parallels that Rosenzweig

¹⁵¹ On Rosenzweig's view, the redemptive task of Christianity is to create a universal community and culture by engaging with the nations of the world. By contrast, the redemptive task of Judaism is to "root" in its self and assert its own difference and particularity. The acknowledgment of Jewish difference propels Christianity outward, furthering its own messianic task. See SE, 339; SR, 324.

¹⁵² DND, 158; TNT, 135.

¹⁵³ DND, 158; TNT, 135.

¹⁵⁴ SE, 426–427; SR, 406.

first noted in his 1917 “*Urzelle*” to the *Star of Redemption*.¹⁵⁵ I also mentioned that Christoph Schulte has claimed that Schelling’s idea of a first contraction and creation of God’s nature corresponds to the Lurianic idea that the first product of *tsimtsum* is *Adam Kadmon*, the ideal human who embodies all the *sefirot*, or divine attributes. Through Oetinger’s influence, Schelling Christianizes the idea: in the *Ages of the World* fragments, the first product of divine contraction is the *Logos* or principle of divine reason, embodied in Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁶ In chapter 5, I also clarified how Schelling understands the nature of wisdom in its relation to moral perfection: wisdom is the production of the *ectype*—or copy—by the possibilities beheld in the *archetype*. On Schelling’s view, this means that human reason should be understood as the means for the Revelation of the *Logos* or principle of divine rationality. Since Schelling regards all of nature as a great chain of being interlocked in an ascending movement from lower to higher potencies, with the last link formed by God’s self-revelation in human reason, and since action that is in conformity with duty turns original wisdom into rational self-knowledge, moral action restores the natural world, God, and each human being to wholeness.

In the concluding book of the *Star*, Rosenzweig conveys a similar idea but recovers the language of Jewish mysticism.¹⁵⁷ Instead of speaking of the *Logos* or principle of divine rationality, Rosenzweig speaks of God’s Shekhina. By creating the finite world, “God himself separates from himself”; only through the redemptive activity of human beings can God be “unified” with His presence, or Shekhina.¹⁵⁸ If the human being is made whole by opening itself up to the commandment to love God, and if the world is made whole through acts of neighborly love, the fulfillment of both commandments brings about “the unification of the holy God and his Shekhina.”¹⁵⁹

In a 1923 open letter to Martin Buber discussing the attitude of the Jew toward the particular laws and practices observed in the Jewish tradition, Franz Rosenzweig wrote: “From Mendelssohn on, our entire people has subjected itself to the torture of this embarrassing questioning; the Jewishness of every individual has squirmed on the needle point of a ‘why.’”¹⁶⁰ Rosenzweig’s answer to

¹⁵⁵ Chapter 5, 192n67.

¹⁵⁶ Chapter 5, 197n85. See Schulte (1994), 116–117. See also Schulze (1957), 84; Habermas (1971), 188; and Franks (2013), 19: “The immediate consequence of the divine will to reveal itself was the form to which human beings should aspire. In Neo-Platonism, this form was perfect wisdom. However, in Lurianic thought, it is the supernal human (*adam elyon*) which is, in its immediate version, incapable of stably embodying divine negativity.”

¹⁵⁷ For a discussion of Rosenzweig’s knowledge of Kabbalah, see Idel (1988). See also Greenberg (1996).

¹⁵⁸ SE, 455; SR, 432.

¹⁵⁹ SE, 456; SR, 433.

¹⁶⁰ DB, 703; TB, 78.

this “why” question is the following one: “Each of his deeds, each fulfillment of a law carries out a piece of this unification. Confessing God’s oneness—the Jew calls it: ‘unifying God.’”¹⁶¹

Before closing this chapter, I want to return to my opening discussion of the freedom for philosophical commitment and offer some thoughts on what Rosenzweig’s view that each fulfillment of the law is for the sake of “unifying God” might have meant for him *as a philosopher*. I mentioned that in the 1917 “Urzelle” to the *Star*, Rosenzweig relates the act of philosophical commitment to the moment in which we awaken to personhood. Given that Rosenzweig conceives Redemption as the awakening of all created beings to personhood, it seems that, on Rosenzweig’s view, redeeming the world also involves awakening in one’s neighbor her capacity to philosophize, her capacity to form for herself an overall metaphysical, ethical, and epistemological framework, a framework that enables her to understand the world and her place in it. In the first section of this chapter, I claimed that this is one of the reasons why Rosenzweig expresses the task of knowing the All in the form of a hope: in order to create in his readers equals capable of recognizing, and thereby confirming, the philosophical system that he is offering. If we keep in mind that, on Schelling and Rosenzweig’s view, our commitments, including our philosophical commitments, are the site of God’s self-revelation, then that thought should sober us as we weigh our reasons to commit ourselves to one philosophical system or another. Indeed, in the “Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism,” Schelling contends that philosophical disagreement has its source in our “egress” from the Absolute: “If we had to deal with the absolute alone, the strife of different systems would never have arisen. Only as we come forth from the absolute does opposition to it originate, and only through this original opposition in the human does any opposition between philosophers originate.”¹⁶² The suggestion is clear: if the opposition between philosophers originates in our egress from the Absolute, then our effort to resolve philosophical disagreement is also an effort to unify God.

Conclusion

We have learned from Jacobi’s nihilism complaint that an All that is One is indistinguishable from Nothing. Rosenzweig shows that he has learned the lesson of Jacobi’s complaint by observing that God’s inner exile (his separation from His Shekhinah) is the condition of possibility for our own existence:

¹⁶¹ SE, 456; SR, 433.

¹⁶² PBDK, 59; PLDC, 163.

God does for us what we want as long as we want it. As long as we hang onto life, he gives us life. He gives us only as much of the truth as we can bear as living creatures, namely our share. If he gave us more, if he gave us his share, the whole truth, then he would lift us out of the bounds of humanity. But just as long as he does not do this, just so long we have no desire for it. We hang on to our creatureliness.¹⁶³

Like Schelling, Rosenzweig finds in the condition of possibility for human individuation an answer to the question concerning why “the absolute . . . [comes] out of itself and [opposes] to itself a world.”¹⁶⁴ If we keep in mind that, on Schelling’s view, this question is a version of the question concerning how to explain the basic structure of human consciousness—the distinction and relation between subject and object—we will see that the *Star of Redemption*, like Schelling’s *Investigations of Human Freedom* and *Ages of the World* fragments, is a work motivated by an attempt to provide an explanation for the basic structure of human experience, and in doing so, enable us to understand and affirm the value of the world and human action in the world. By the time Rosenzweig started writing the *Star*, he regarded this form of explanation as one that perhaps only some of us seek.

¹⁶³ SE, 462–463; SR, 439.

¹⁶⁴ PBDK, 77–78; PLDC, 174–175.

Conclusion

Is the cover of skepticism—the conversion of metaphysical finitude into intellectual lack—a denial of the human or an expression of it? For of course there are those for whom the denial of the human is the human.

—Stanley Cavell

One of the principal aims of this study has been to show that, for Kant and his heirs, what is fundamentally at issue in reason's conflict with itself is nothing less than our ability to affirm both the value of the world and of human action in the world. I would like to close by considering how an episode in the story of Rosenzweig's life enables us to understand why. As I will explain below, this period culminated in Rosenzweig's near-conversion to Christianity in the summer of 1913, and in his eventual decision to recommit himself to Judaism and lead an observant, or *halachic*, life. By focusing on this decisive chapter of Rosenzweig's life, I hope to bring into focus what is philosophically and existentially at issue in the development of post-Kantian German Idealism.

The story of Rosenzweig's near-conversion has become the subject of lore; it is now one of the seminal narratives of modern Jewish thought. The traditional story, as told for at least the past seventy years, depicts Rosenzweig's return to Judaism after nearly converting to Christianity as the outcome of a struggle between faith and reason: allegedly, Rosenzweig renounced a promising career in philosophy and turned to a life of faith, a life he initially believed was only available for Christians but later realized was also possible for Jews.¹ Yet, in *Franz Rosenzweig's Conversions: World Denial and World Redemption*, Benjamin Pollock provides a groundbreaking account of this story and argues convincingly that Rosenzweig's near-conversion to Christianity and return to Judaism was not the result of a struggle between faith and reason, as the story has traditionally been told, but the result of a "long-standing skepticism about the world itself

¹ See Glatzer (1998).

and about the place of the individual in it.”² As Pollock contends, what was at issue for Rosenzweig in 1913 was “*the moral or spiritual status of the world*.” The questions that plagued Rosenzweig were: “Can one realize one’s free selfhood, can one realize the spiritual potential of the soul . . . while constrained within the limits of worldly existence? Or does spiritual or intellectual or moral self-fulfillment demand a radical denial of the world and, inter alia, of one’s very existence in the world?”³ Building on Pollock’s story, I want to show that what enabled Rosenzweig to overcome his world denial was primarily his engagement with Schelling and with Schelling’s understanding of the meaning of, and solution to, the conflict of reason.⁴

Both for Schelling and Rosenzweig, the ultimate meaning of the conflict of reason is our tendency to deny our human finitude and shun our vocation. Let me clarify. Kant’s solution to the conflict of reason is interwoven with the negative and positive results of his critical philosophy. He prohibits the employment of reason in metaphysical speculations outside the bounds of experience and denies us knowledge of the supersensible, but he recovers the concepts and ideas that belong to speculative or transcendent metaphysics by showing that such concepts are necessary for the practical employment of reason. Yet both Schelling and Rosenzweig hold that there is a *metaphysical* or *ontological ground* for our cognitive finitude.⁵ The finitude of human knowledge (the fact that, for us, God cannot be an object of theoretical knowledge) results from or is grounded in the incompleteness of being; our inability to *know* God stems from the form of incompleteness that affects God, human beings, and the natural world. For that reason, the desire to know God, to provide a (theoretical) proof of His existence, is symptomatic of the refusal to participate in His disclosure and realization. Schelling and Rosenzweig agree with the negative and positive results of Kant’s critical philosophy, but they understand the turn to the practical in a more radical sense than Kant does. As I explained in chapters 5 and 6, Schelling and Rosenzweig understand the Kantian turn to the practical to mean that the representation of God by finite beings is a topic of practical philosophy. On Schelling and Rosenzweig’s view, it is through our commitments, the values

² Pollock (2014), 3.

³ Pollock (2014), 3.

⁴ It is a pity that Pollock’s book does not deal more extensively with Schelling’s influence on Rosenzweig. I have asked Pollock about this issue, and in a conference I organized at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem’s Mandel Scholion Center in December 2015, he gave an excellent paper titled “On God as an Object of Action: Schelling, Rosenzweig, and the Spirit of Practical Postulation,” which brings into focus the relationship between Schelling and Rosenzweig in a spirit very similar to this book.

⁵ See chapter 6, 225.

that we ascribe to ourselves when we form maxims for action, that God is both cognized and partly realized.⁶

In chapter 5, I clarified why, for Kant, the moral law is the basis for a definition of the good that can be universally and intersubjectively agreed on. When the claims of self-love are given the form of a universal law, they become rational; there is sufficient reason to realize those ends, and those claims enable us to determine the concept of the good. If we identify God with the good, then the idea that the moral law enables us to arrive at a definition of the good can help us understand Schelling and Rosenzweig's view that God is both cognized and partly realized by human action in the world, for it is by acting in the natural world and among others, by giving the maxims of our actions the form of universal laws, that we contribute to determining the concept of the good.

Pollock rightly notes that, before his personal transformation in 1913, Rosenzweig was tempted to respond to the tension between his selfhood and his worldliness through a form of world-denial that he associated with Gnosticism, and which in the most extreme case would lead to suicide.⁷ What enabled Rosenzweig to resist that temptation, what enabled him to remain in life, was the realization that the tension we experience between our selfhood and our worldliness "amounts to a call to the kind of action that would . . . realize redemption."⁸ Rosenzweig was able to resist the temptation to deny the world, because he came to view the reconciliation of the self and the world "as a process of historical realization," one that ultimately led to the realization or unification of God by human action in the world. Rosenzweig's initial turn to Christianity and subsequent return to Judaism was the result of his belief that the reconciliation of the self and the world ought to be conceived historically.⁹

Many of the ideas we considered in chapters 5 and 6 provide us with the conceptual resources to understand Rosenzweig's eventual ability to affirm the value of the world and human action in the world. Earlier, I summarized the Kantian view that it is by acting in conformity with the moral law that we participate in determining the concept of the good; I will say more about this in a moment. In chapter 5, I argued that both Schelling's *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom* and his *Ages of the World* fragments are motivated by an attempt to provide an explanation for the relation between subject and object (self and world) that characterizes all states of human consciousness. We saw how, in his attempt to understand the basic relational structure of human consciousness, Schelling advanced a developmental monism constituted by the relations

⁶ See chapter 5, 205.

⁷ Pollock (2014), 142.

⁸ Pollock (2014), 191.

⁹ Pollock (2014), 4, 12, 177.

between God, the natural world, and human beings in Creation, Revelation, and Redemption. In chapter 6, we saw how Rosenzweig furthered Schelling's views, and toward the end of the chapter, I mentioned how Rosenzweig came to answer the question concerning why he led a *halachic* life, why he followed the laws and practices observed in the Jewish tradition: on Rosenzweig's view, each *mitzvah*, each fulfillment of the law, unifies God.¹⁰ Lastly, I offered a way of understanding what it means to unify God: to arrive at a common conception of the good, a shared understanding of our highest values.

The view that the tension between one's selfhood and one's worldliness amounts to a call to the kind of action that would realize redemption, and the view that God is both cognized and partly realized by human action in the world, might sound quite foreign to philosophers now working in the Continental and Anglophone traditions. In the next few pages, I hope to make these views more accessible by comparing them with contemporary interpretations of Kant's views on the nature of practical knowledge and (intentional) action. I will draw on works by Christine Korsgaard, Stephen Engstrom, and Sebastian Rödl, and I will mainly elucidate two ideas they develop: the purpose of (virtuous) action is self-constitution, and virtue is knowledge, practical knowledge of the good. To some extent, I have already clarified these ideas in previous chapters. For example, in chapter 3 I drew on Korsgaard's view that we constitute ourselves as particular persons by enacting and determining our values, and I clarified Engstrom's view that the moral law is not only a categorical imperative for action but also a "criterion of validity for the employment of the concept of the good."¹¹ Yet it is worth further developing these ideas here, now that we have in view the trajectory of thought that I have traced, which starts with the Kantian view that God is not an object of (theoretical) knowledge, and ends with Schelling and Rosenzweig's more radical view that God is both cognized and partly realized by human action in the world.

In *The Form of Practical Knowledge*, Engstrom contends that the aim of (virtuous) action is self-constitution, and that we know the good by constituting ourselves as particular persons. Let me start with the idea that the aim of (virtuous) action is self-constitution. Engstrom characterizes an intention as the act of ascribing to ourselves a practical self-conception, and hence as a form of self-specification. He writes:

It follows too, that, as the agent's *own* efficacious specification of what it means to do, intention can also be characterized as the *self-specification* of this practical self-conception, an act that might also be described as

¹⁰ SE, 456; SR, 433.

¹¹ Engstrom (1992), 748.

a practical subject's attachment of a practical predicate to itself. . . . For an action to be voluntary in the more robust sense just outlined, then, is for it to spring from an intention, or an exercise of practical thought in which one attaches to oneself a conception of some action—a practical predicate—and therein efficaciously specifies what one means to do.¹²

If I intend to help a friend who is going through a difficult period in her life, for example, I attach to myself the practical predicate “the sort of person who helps friends when they need it.” In doing so, I determine who I am. When we act intentionally, we realize that each of our actions further determines what we mean when we say “I.”

Engstrom also holds that the act of attaching to ourselves a practical predicate is an act of cognizing the good; Korsgaard and Rödl develop similar views. To see why, we need to keep in mind that, on Kant's view, an action is a movement that is governed by a maxim or practical principle, and a maxim includes both the act performed and the end for the sake of which the act is undertaken. Yet a virtuous or moral action is governed by the categorical imperative: “Act only according to that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.”¹³ What we evaluate, when we decide whether we can give the maxim of our actions the form of a universal law, is the *value* of the whole package: the act performed for the sake of a certain end. And as Korsgaard points out, “When an agent finds that she *must* will a certain maxim as a universal law, she supposes that the action it describes has [a] specific kind of value.”¹⁴ In other words, it is by acting morally that we determine what is of ultimate value, what is good.

Sebastian Rödl also clarifies why, from a Kantian perspective, doing something intentionally is representing doing it as good (just as judging something is representing it as true).¹⁵ His starting point is Kant's claim that the will is practical reason, or the power to act according to the representation of laws.¹⁶ But what does “the power to act according to the representation of laws” mean? Rödl points out that a law is something general, something that actions according to the law exemplify, so he says, more generally, “that the will is a power to act according to general representations or *concepts*.”¹⁷ Moreover, because reason is “the power of inference,” the power to derive something particular from

¹² Engstrom (2009), 33.

¹³ G, 4:421.

¹⁴ Korsgaard (2009), 11.

¹⁵ See Rödl (2010), 140: “Our proposition identifies a certain manner of representing an action, namely as good, which is acting in a certain way, namely intentionally.”

¹⁶ G, 4:412.

¹⁷ Rödl (2010), 145.

something general, Rödl contends that the will (practical reason) is the power to derive a specific action from the representation of a general end. When I act intentionally, I represent an end as something that it would be good to do, and I derive a specific action as an instantiation of this general concept of an end. But laws are not only general; they also express necessary relations. For this reason, Rödl argues that the conclusion of a practical inference is a “productive representation” that is “conscious of itself as necessary.”¹⁸ The conclusion of a practical inference is productive, because it is *an action*, something that brings about an end, and our consciousness of the action’s necessity is expressed in our conception of it as *good*, or *to be done*.¹⁹ Rödl’s study helps us see why, from a Kantian perspective, doing something intentionally is thinking it good, why the good is the “formal object of the will” (just as the true is the formal object of the intellect).²⁰ If we identify God with the good, then the idea that “doing something intentionally is thinking it good” can help us understand Schelling and Rosenzweig’s view that God is both cognized and realized by human action in the world.²¹ I mentioned earlier that what enabled Rosenzweig to resist the temptation to deny the world, was his (Schellingian) view that the reconciliation of the self and the world is a process of historical realization, one that ultimately calls for the unification and partial realization of God by human action in the world. My hope is that Rosenzweig’s life, and the trajectory of thought that enabled him to address his most pressing philosophical and existential concerns—a trajectory of thought that I have attempted to trace in this book—may enable each of us to affirm the value of the world and our own action in the world.

In the introduction to this book I promised to show why my take on the issues that shaped the contours of post-Kantian German Idealism can help us see that the conflict of reason can be regarded as the underlying concern that competing interpretations of this period share. I would like to close by substantiating that claim, and I will focus on four interpretations: those offered by Frederick Beiser and Paul Franks, Sebastian Gardner, Michelle Kosch, and Frederick Neuhouser and Daniel Breazeale.²²

To start, let me show how the conflict of reason can be seen as the underlying concern shared by Beiser’s and Franks’s comparable interpretations. As

¹⁸ Rödl (2010), 145.

¹⁹ See Rödl (2010), 145.

²⁰ Rödl (2010), 139. See also Rödl (2007), 46: “When an action is arrived at by reasoning, then that which explains why the subject is doing what she is doing is something in the light of which she thinks it good.”

²¹ Rödl (2007), 49.

²² See Introduction, 16.

I argued in chapters 1 and 2, the German Idealist interest in systematicity can be reconstructed as a convincing philosophical motive by considering what would be required in order to meet reason's demand for unconditioned explanation, and by considering the ways Kant's critical philosophy fails to meet this demand. While Kant leaves certain aspects of human experience unexplained—for example, on Kant's view, space and time are the *contingent* forms of human sensibility—the post-Kantian German Idealists try to derive all aspects of human experience from a single first principle. Yet in chapters 1 and 5, I considered Jacobi's and Schelling's different versions of the idea that a philosophical system is incompatible with human freedom. This manifestation of the conflict of reason shows why the authority of reason is at stake in the construction of an all-comprehending and self-validating philosophical system.

In chapters 2, 3, and 4, I also considered why this manifestation of the conflict of reason leads to the view that philosophy, as a whole, must be based on freedom. In chapter 2, drawing on Maimon's work, I clarified the motivation for the idea that a philosophical system must be actualized in the subject. Maimon addresses the worry that Kant voices in the *quid juris* question by describing a metaphysical and epistemological framework that both enables us to view the categories and forms of sensibility as the conditions of possibility for all real thought and assures us of our ability to judge or synthesize concepts correctly by assuming an identity-in-difference between the human or finite mind and the divine or infinite mind. Yet, as I pointed out, Maimon also holds that the idea or notion of an infinite intellect *has actuality* only to the extent that we adopt as an end of our own the end or task that is named by that notion, the task of a complete explanation of human experience. Without this act of appropriation, Maimon's alternative solution to Kant's question "remains a castle in the air."²³ In chapters 3 and 4, I considered Fichte's and Schelling's different interpretations of the idea that a philosophical system must be actualized in the subject. In chapter 3, I clarified the Fichtean view that we posit ourselves as particular persons by upholding for ourselves an ideal that we regard as the highest standard or norm for our conduct. And in chapter 4, I described how Fichte and Schelling employ this view to move beyond the impasse where philosophical reason would remain without turning to the practical. Because criticism and dogmatism, or idealism and realism, represent two irrefutable and theoretically indemonstrable philosophical systems, it is only by appealing to practical considerations (by clarifying the practical implications of considering the "intellect in itself" or the "thing in itself" as the explanatory ground of experience) that we can choose between one system or the other. For this reason, Fichte and Schelling arrive at the view that

²³ Strf, IV, 208.

if we cannot arrive at the unconditioned in human knowledge theoretically, we must move to the practical and realize it in that realm.

Like Neuhouser and Breazeale, I also show how Fichte's theory of subjectivity plays a role in establishing the unity of the practical and theoretical employments of reason, thereby bringing unity and coherence to the human being. In chapter 4, I explained how Fichte reconceives the traditional distinction between theoretical and practical philosophy. On Fichte's view, this distinction is an abstract version of the two forms of activity that constitute the "absolute I." What Fichte calls "real activity" corresponds to all that has traditionally fallen within the domain of practical philosophy, and what he calls "ideal activity" corresponds to all that has traditionally fallen within the domain of theoretical philosophy. Thus, for Fichte, the conflict of reason, the tension that we experience between thinking and acting, knowing and willing, manifests the original division within God or the Absolute.

Fichte's failure to account for the original division within the Absolute was the starting point of chapter 5. There, I claimed that the motivation for Schelling's heterodox conception of human freedom, freedom for good or evil, is an attempt to explain the original division or opposition within the Absolute, the division that the basic relational structure of human consciousness registers. This shows that Kosch's take on this period, her view that one of the main issues shaping the rise and fall of German Idealism is the difficulty of accounting for the possibility of moral evil once we accept the idea that moral agency is self-legislating, is correct, but the problem of accounting for the possibility of moral evil is interwoven with the more fundamental problem of understanding and solving the conflict of reason.

What about Gardner's axiological interpretation? Does my take on this period also clarify why "a dominant theme in the literary and philosophical writings of the German romantics is the subject's relation to nature," and why "German romanticism evinces a preoccupation with establishing in or through the subject's consciousness of the natural world a relation to value"?²⁴ One of the central concerns of this book has been to emphasize the contemporary relevance of German Idealism by showing how this period's understanding of the meaning of, and solution to, the conflict of reason enables us to affirm anew the value of the world and human action in the world. As we have seen, Schelling and Rosenzweig invite us to consider human action in the world as the means by which God is both cognized and partly realized.

²⁴ Gardner (2002), 221.

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Immanuel Kant

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- KU 1789. *Kritik der Urteilskraft*.
- MS 1797. *Die Metaphysik der Sitten*.
- Prol 1783. *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können*.
- RGV 1793. *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft*.
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Salomon Maimon

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Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Von Schelling

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 PBDK 1795. *Philosophische Briefe über Dogmatismus und Kriticismus*. Bd. 1, III of SWBA.
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